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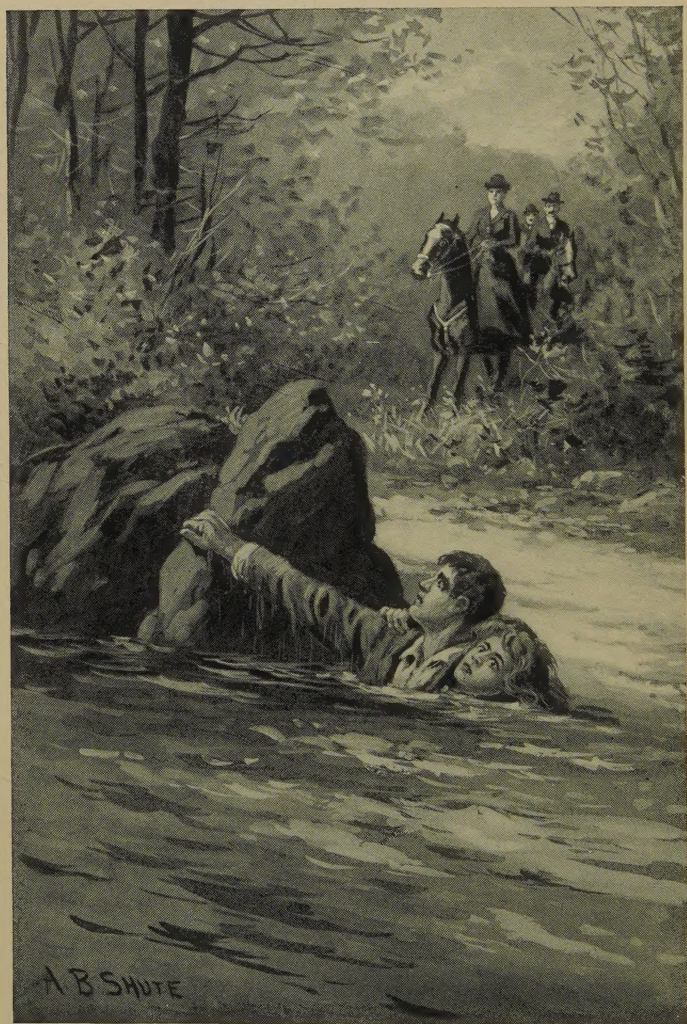
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He clung to the side of the big stone with all his might.
Page 18.

LARRY THE WANDERER

OR

THE RISE OF A NOBODY

BY

EDWARD STRATEMEYER

Author of "Old Glory Series," "Colonial Series," "Pan-American Series,"
"Bound to Succeed Series," "Ship and Shore Series," "Working
Upward Series," "Between Boer and Briton," "On to
Pekin," "Two Young Lumbermen," "American
Boys' Life of Theodore Roosevelt," "Ameri-
can Boys' Life of William McKinley."

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PREFACE

“LARRY THE WANDERER” is a somewhat different story from those I have given to young readers in the past, but I trust it will, nevertheless, prove equally interesting and instructive.

The tale relates the things which happen to a bright and lively youth who, at a tender age, finds himself utterly alone in the world, with no knowledge of where he came from or where he belongs. Larry’s greatest ambition in life is to solve the mystery of his parentage, and he wanders from place to place in his strange quest until fortune throws him into the companionship of an artist who is fairly well to do, and who takes a strange fancy to the boy. Aided by the artist Larry settles down to earn his living as a lake fisherman, and while pursuing this vocation comes in contact with those who know much concerning his hidden past. By a combination of circumstances Larry and his benefactor are made to suffer for a crime about which they know absolutely nothing. In their efforts to clear themselves they get deeper and deeper into trouble; but in the end the odd tangle is straightened out, and Larry’s ambition in life is fulfilled.

My sole object in writing this tale was to show what

a truly manly lad can do even under the most trying circumstances. Larry is at times hot-headed, but he learns how to control his temper, and there are times when he even returns good for evil. In these respects his example is well worth following.

This story was originally published as a serial in "Good News," of which the author was at the time editor. As a serial it received a liberal amount of praise. I trust that in its revised form it will bring equal pleasure to those who may read it.

EDWARD STRATEMEYER.

February 1, 1904

LARRY THE WANDERER

CHAPTER I

A BOY WANDERER

"Hi, boy! what are you doing here?"

"Resting, sir."

"Resting? Well, if that isn't cool! What right have you to sneak into a man's barn in this fashion?"

"No particular right, that's a fact," replied the boy, as he slowly rose to his feet. "But I don't see as I've hurt the building any, sir."

For a second the gentleman addressed stared at the boy as if he had not heard aright.

"What's that?"

"I don't see as I've hurt your barn any, have I?"

"Why, you rascal——"

"Hold on, please; I'm no rascal."

"Well, if you're not, what are you?"

"I'm a homeless boy, down on my luck."

"Where are you from?"

"Well, I started from New York, but I've been in Philadelphia and half a dozen other places."

"What are you doing out here?"

"Looking for work. I got tired of trying places in the city. Everything is crowded to death."

"What can you do?"

"'Most anything I'm put at, sir."

"That's saying a good deal, young man."

"Well, I've worked at eight different jobs in as many months, and I feel as if I had dabbled in almost everything."

"How old are you?"

"About sixteen, I make it."

"Don't you know?"

The boy shook his head, and for a brief instant a trace of soberness crossed his manly and handsome face.

"Are your folks living?"

"I don't know."

"Well, but—see here; where in creation did you spring from?"

"Want to know real bad, sir?"

And the boy stepped closer, while a quizzical smile played over his face.

"I'm rather curious."

"It will cost you a breakfast to hear me spin my yarn."

"Why—why—oh, I see! So you want breakfast?"

"Don't you think a young fellow who hadn't eaten

anything since yesterday noon would want something this morning?"

"Didn't you have any supper last night?"

"I had a drink of well water and a piece of cold shoulder."

"And the cold shoulder didn't set well, eh?" returned the man, with a short laugh. "Well, you're a character, and no mistake. Come up to the house."

"Thank you. Say! you haven't any bulldogs around here, have you?"

"No. What makes you ask that question?"

"Well, you see my clothing is so full of holes that I'm rather tempting to that breed of animals."

Again the man laughed. "Come along, and if your story is a straight one, I'll not only give you a hot breakfast, but I'll see if I can't find a new coat and trousers for you."

"Thanks. I'm mighty glad I struck your barn last night. Best barn I've slept in for a good while."

The boy said this so soberly that the man laughed once more, this time heartier than ever. "You're a free-and-easy lad, I must say," he observed.

"I try to be. What's the use of going around with a funeral face? That doesn't pay. If I'd put on such a face you wouldn't give me that nice hot breakfast nor those good clothes, would you?"

"Perhaps you won't get them after all."

"Won't I? I know a good man when I see him."

"And you take me for a good man?"

"I do, every time."

"Some folks in this neighborhood don't think me a good man."

"What of that? Most people around here would take me for a thief and kick me out instead of giving me work or something to eat."

By this time the man and the boy had reached the house—an old stone building, situated close to a large mountain stream.

"Sit down here," said the man, pointing to a bench which stood on the broad porch. "I'll have the house-keeper fix you something."

He disappeared through the open doorway, and the boy took the seat pointed out. In less than two minutes the man was back.

"Now, let me hear your yarn."

"Is the breakfast on the way?"

"Yes; smell the coffee?"

The boy took a long sniff.

"Gosh! that's good! I haven't had a decent cup of coffee for a month!"

"You shall have all you want to eat and drink. Now, tell me something of yourself, for I must confess I am full of curiosity. What is your name?"

"They call me Larry."

"Larry what?"

"I haven't any last name—that is, any regular one."

"No last name at all?"

"Well, the boys in New York call me Larry Curly."

"Why did they call you that?"

The boy took off his battered straw hat and pointed to his dark brown hair. "That's the reason," he replied. "See the curls?"

"Oh, and so they called you Curly on that account?"

"Yes."

"And you were brought up in New York?"

"I wasn't brought up at all; I simply grew, sir."

"And you say you never knew who your father or mother was?"

"Never, sir. I'm an out and out wanderer, without relatives or a home."

At that moment the housekeeper came from the kitchen.

"If you please, Mr. Bruin, breakfast is ready," she said.

"Very well, Maggie. We will come in at once. Come, Larry, you can finish your story at the breakfast table. That will be more agreeable for you, eh?"

"Yes, sir; a square meal always loosens my tongue."

The boy arose and followed the man into the house. But before sitting down to the well-filled table he stepped into the kitchen, and took a thorough wash at the sink, and combed his hair with a pocket-comb.

"Not an ordinary street boy by any means," thought Howard Bruin, as he watched this toilet-making. "He

is far above the ordinary run of city waifs. I'll wager that there's some great mystery connected with that lad's life."

Larry took the seat shown him, and was quite surprised to see the man take a chair opposite.

"We will have breakfast together," said Howard Bruin.

"Aren't you above eating with a mere tramp?" asked Larry curiously.

"I don't take you to be a mere tramp, Larry; I'm sure you never traveled with tramps."

"That's where you're right. I always go on my own hook."

"Whom did you live with in New York?"

"I didn't live with any one."

"Not when you were young?"

"Oh, I don't know about that, sir. The first I can remember is that I was on a bed in the hospital. That was six years ago. The doctors said I had brain fever."

"Well, somebody must have brought you to the hospital."

"No; that is, nobody outside of a couple of policemen. The doctors told me that I was found locked up in a cellar on Cherry Street. How I came there they did not know."

"Didn't you know?"

"I tried to remember, but couldn't. I had a dim idea of a couple of men, an old woman, or two old wo-

men, and a lot of quarreling and fighting about money, and it seems to me I was knocked down and left alone. Then I do remember a long spell of darkness, which was horrible."

"And it was that which gave you the brain fever?"

"The doctors said it must have been. They did all they could to get me to tell them something of the past, and I tried real hard, but it was no go. The whole thing seemed to be sponged out, that is, all but what I've told you about."

"No one ever came to the hospital to claim you?"

"No."

"Perhaps they were afraid they would be arrested for deserting you."

"I suppose that was it."

"Humph! Here, have another cup of coffee and some more ham and eggs."

"Thanks. Do you know this is the best meal I've had since I left Chicago last week?"

"I'm glad you like it. How did you get away from the hospital?"

"When I got well they put me in an industrial institution and then bound me out to a man by the name of Joshua Small, and he was the smallest man I ever had anything to do with."

"You didn't like him?"

"No, Joshua Small and I couldn't agree. He wanted

me to do three men's work on half a man's feed, and I struck."

"What did he say when you struck?"

"I didn't give him a chance to say anything."

"You ran away?"

"I did. I wasn't his slave, and I left and went to Philadelphia. There I got a two-months' job at the telephone works, putting up 'phones, and another three-months' job in an athletic club-house, taking care of the bowling-alleys."

"So you've knocked around quite a bit."

"About as much as any boy of my age."

"I suppose you are anxious to learn something about yourself?"

"Yes, indeed." Larry stopped eating for a minute and swallowed something in his throat which was not food. "I'd give my right hand to know who I am, and to find my father and mother, if they are alive."

"I don't doubt you, my lad. Well, you've had hard luck, and no mistake. Have some more ham and eggs?"

"Sorry, but I haven't room, Mr.——"

"My name is Howard Bruin."

"Any relation to Mr. Percy Bruin, of Philadelphia?"

"Why Percy Bruin is a second cousin! How do you happen to know him?"

"He was a member of the athletic club I worked for."

"Ah, I see." Howard Bruin's face grew thoughtful. "Do you know much of him?"

"I knew him too well!" cried Larry, his dark eyes flashing angrily.

"What do you mean?"

"Excuse me, but it wouldn't be right for me to run down your cousin, seeing that you've done the handsome thing by me."

"That's all right, Larry, I might as well tell you that there is no love lost between Percy and myself."

"He had me discharged from my job, and not only that, he put a slur on my name!" went on Larry resentfully. "I can stand being knocked around, but I won't be called a thief by any one!"

"Did he call you that?"

"He said as much. You see, there were some pockets picked at the club-house, and he had the blame put on me. He wanted to have me arrested, but the other members wouldn't have it on account of the scandal getting in the newspapers. But I was discharged, and it left such a stain on my name I couldn't get another job in Philadelphia."

Larry had risen to his feet while speaking, and now he stood before Howard Bruin with clenched fists.

"Do I look like a thief, sir?" he demanded.

"No, you do not, Larry. Percy must have been mistaken. He is a hot-headed fellow."

"He's worse than that; he's a miserable sneak! I beg your pardon, Mr. Bruin, but when I——"

"Don't beg my pardon for it, Larry," interrupted the man. "I agree with you. Percy Bruin, although he is my relative, is a thorough sneak. He treated me almost as badly as he treated you."

The boy stared at Howard Bruin in open-mouthed astonishment.

"You don't mean it?" he said slowly.

"Yes, I do. It's a story I don't like to tell to everybody, as it is a family affair; but, as I intimated at the start, there is no love lost between us."

Howard Bruin sprang to his feet and took up his soft hat, which he had flung on a lounge in the corner.

"Come to the stable with me, Larry," he said. "I imagine you would like to do a little work on that breakfast. It's a chance to earn some money."

"I'll do some work without money. I calculated to work for that meal. I'm no charity boy."

"I must say I like your spirit."

"Thanks. Say, Mr. Bruin, haven't you a steady job here for me?"

Howard Bruin rubbed his chin meditatively.

"Hardly, Larry. You see, I'm an old bachelor, and live here alone with Maggie, who used to be my

mother's housekeeper. I only keep one horse and a couple of cows, and I do the work around the place myself, just for exercise and a change from my regular work."

"Do you go to Cleveland to do business?"

"Sometimes, but not often. My work comes from New York and Philadelphia. I suppose you do not know my occupation."

"No, sir."

"I am an artist. I illustrate scientific works, books on natural history and travel, and the like. I like to live out here, where I get away from the city bustle and confusion. The neighborhood of a country town like Cleveland just suits me."

By this time the two had reached the barn. Under Howard Bruin's directions, Larry set to work at once, pitching in with a will, and doing everything in a manner which could hardly be excelled.

The barn was situated upon the bank of the stream before mentioned, but at a point some distance below the residence.

A hundred feet farther down, the stream made a short turn between the banks and rushed over a number of sharp rocks and down an incline studded with loose stones.

"It's a nice place to live," observed the boy, as he listened for an instant to the rushing of the waters. "There must be fish——"

He broke off short as a loud cry of fear reached his ears.

"What does that mean?" he asked.

"It came from up the stream," replied Howard Bruin. "It was a girl's voice, if I'm not mistaken."

"Say, will you look there?" burst from Larry's lips, and he pointed out into the water.

There, on a frail raft, composed of only a few bits of boards, knelt a young girl, not over ten years of age. Her hair was flying loosely in the breeze and her face was filled with terror.

"She'll be drowned if she gets in the rapids!" ejaculated Howard Bruin. "And, yes, it is Maud Noxwell!"

CHAPTER II

LARRY'S STOUTHEARTEDNESS

"WHO is Maud Noxwell?" questioned Larry, as he cast his eye around for a rope.

"She is the daughter of a rich lady who lives around the bend of the road. What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to save her from going over the falls. Isn't there any rope around?"

Howard Bruin made a rapid search.

"Here's a wash-line."

"That will do, I guess. Come on."

Without another word Larry ran with all speed to a point a short distance below the barn.

Here the stream narrowed just before entering among the rocks, and the boy calculated that the frail raft would pass within ten yards of the shore.

Quickly unwinding the wash-line, he made a loop at one end.

"Save me! Save me!" screamed the girl, in an agony of fear.

"Catch the end of the rope!" sang out Larry, as he let fly.

"I—I can't let go!" cried the girl.

The rope came down to within six inches of her head, but in her terror she made no attempt to catch it, but clung fast to the raft, which now rocked violently from side to side.

"You must catch it!" cried Larry, as he both gathered in the rope and followed the raft down the stream. "Catch it now; it's your only chance!"

Again Larry threw the rope, and this time the girl made a quick grab for it.

But the raft had now reached the first of the rapids above the falls. It spun around and around, and before the girl could catch the rope she was sent headlong into the madly rushing stream. She gave one long, piercing scream and then disappeared, to rise to the surface ten feet further down the water-course.

"She is lost now!" cried Howard Bruin, who had followed closely upon Larry's heels.

"Not if I can save her!" responded the boy quickly. "Here, hold this end of the rope."

With swift steps Larry ran still farther down the stream. Presently he reached a point some distance ahead of the form of the young girl, now floating partly under and partly above water.

"Hold fast!" he cried to the man, throwing him one end of the rope, and slipping the loop over his shoulders, he leaped into the stream.

The swift current at once began to carry him downward toward the falls. Yet he struck out boldly for the

middle of the stream, at the same time shouting to the girl to come his way, if possible.

"Oh, save me!" screamed the girl, for at least the fifteenth time, as Larry bobbed up close by her side.

"I will. Put your arms around my neck."

"I—I—can't."

"Yes, you can. It's the only way."

The girl put up her hands, and Larry threw one around his neck direct and the other up under his arm. By this she was prevented from choking him.

"We'll both be drowned!" she wailed. "Oh, why did I go on the raft! Mamma told me not to go!"

"Hold tight now," cried Larry. "Pull in there!" he yelled to Howard Bruin.

The man complied. The wash-line strained fearfully.

"Take it easy," shouted the boy, "or you'll snap the line!"

"I must pull you up stream!" panted the man. "If I don't, you'll be dashed on the rocks."

"Well, go slow! There is lots of time. I've got the girl safe enough!"

Thus cautioned, Howard Bruin began to work his way cautiously up the bank of the swiftly flowing torrent. The wash-line was stretched like a harp-cord, and the perspiration rolled down the man's face.

Larry tried to swim, and thus assist in the work, but the girl he was trying to save was a dead weight upon

him, and he could do little more than keep her and himself upon the surface.

"Tie the line fast to a tree and then run it in to the bank!" called Larry. "You are far enough above the rapids now."

Coming to a crooked tree which overhung the stream, Howard Bruin made fast. But in his excitement he made rather a loose knot, and hardly had he started to run the line to shore than it began to slip. Larry shouted out a warning, but it came too late. The line came loose and slipped through Howard Bruin's hands.

"It's gone!" he yelled hoarsely. He made a jump and caught the very end. But he could not hold it, and over he went into the stream, the line whipping an instant later out of his grasp. "You're lost!" he shouted, and then he had to swim to save himself.

Larry saw the line slip, and realized at once that if anything was to be done he must do it. No one else could now help him. Fortunately, his worn-out shoes were loose, and he had no difficulty in kicking them off. While he was doing this he struck out desperately for the opposite shore, which seemed to offer a better chance of escape.

"Don't hold on quite so tight," he said to the terrified girl. "I can't swim if you do that."

She loosened her grasp just a bit. She was too frightened to do more.

The pair were now less than a hundred feet from where the worst of the rapids began. The water boiled and foamed all around them, and Larry's eyes were dashed full of spray.

"I must make that bank somehow," muttered the boy to himself grimly. "I've got to do it, if it takes every ounce of muscle and nerve in me."

He kept on boldly, desperately, madly. The shore was now less than fifteen feet away. Ten seconds more, and their fate would be decided.

But now a jagged rock loomed up in front of them, over which the fierce torrent of water swept and dashed at a furious rate.

"Oh, the rock!" shrieked the girl. "We'll be dashed to pieces!"

She had hardly spoken when Larry's shoulder came in sharp and painful contact with the rock. Then his head struck, and for the instant he lost his senses.

Howard Bruin, who had by this time climbed out of the stream, and was now watching Larry's efforts to save himself and the girl, gave a cry of alarm.

"I told him he would lose his life!"

But, luckily, it was only for the instant that Larry's senses left him.

Before he and his fair burden had slid from the rock Larry pulled himself together mentally. He made a wild clutch to the right and to the left of him, and one

of his hands came in contact with a sharp corner of the rock. The boy's grip was a good one, and he clung to the side of the big stone with all his might.

The water roared and dashed on all sides of the pair, and the girl screamed at the top of her voice.

At that moment several ladies and gentlemen on horseback appeared on the bank close to them.

"Look! Look! A boy and a girl in the water!" cried the foremost of the ladies.

"Why, it's Maud Noxwell!" ejaculated one of the gentlemen. "How did she get down here?"

"We must save them!"

"Get a rope!"

"There is a long fence rail. Won't that reach the rock?"

The rail mentioned was brought forth and found to be too short by two feet.

"There is a longer rail back here," cried one of the gentlemen, "I'll get that."

He sprang away and soon returned with the rail he had mentioned. One end was allowed to rest on the bank, while the other was dropped to the rock.

Larry saw it coming and caught it. Then he placed the end where it could not slip.

"Come, hold fast now," he said to the girl.

She obeyed tremblingly, and with his fair burden clinging around his neck, Larry worked his way to shore.

More than once it looked as if both would be swept away by the current, but at last the danger was past, and dripping wet, both stood once again on solid ground.

"Maud, what can this mean?" cried one of the ladies of the party.

"I was on a raft, and it got away from the end of the garden," replied the miss of ten. "Mamma told me not to go on the raft."

"You saved her life, young man," said one of the gentlemen, turning to Larry. "It is quite a feather in your cap."

"Thanks," returned the boy laconically. "We had a lively scramble of it, though."

"I'm very much obliged," said Maud Noxwell, somewhat stiffly. "I'll tell mamma what a brave boy you are."

"That's all right," replied Larry hastily. "Say, how can I get back to the other side?"

"There is a bridge up the stream about a quarter of a mile," replied the gentleman who had first addressed him.

"All right. I'm off."

"Hold on. Do you belong here?"

"No; but I'm stopping just now at Mr. Howard Bruin's place."

"Oh!" The gentleman said no more, but turned away.

One of the ladies, who had not spoken to Larry, but who had been watching him narrowly, now came forward.

"Young man, may I ask your name?"

"Larry, madame."

"And your last name?"

"Larry Curly."

"You say you do not belong here? May I ask where you do belong?"

"I came originally from New York, but I've knocked around a good bit in Philadelphia and other cities."

The lady seemed to become more interested than ever.

"And you say your name is Larry Curly?"

Before Larry could reply to the last question one of the other ladies rode up.

"Come, Lucy; we are waiting for you," she said.

"Go on; I'll be with you presently," replied the lady. "I wish to ask this—this noble young fellow a few questions, that is all."

"Very well; meet us at the picnic grounds."

And the second lady rode off, followed by the others, one of the gentlemen allowing Maud to ride his steed to her house while he walked.

"And where may you be from, Curly?" questioned the lady who had remained behind.

"New York City," returned Larry, wondering if the

lady had forgotten his former answer to this question.

"I mean what part of New York?"

"Oh! As near as I can figure it, Cherry Street."

For a moment the lady was silent. Then she put out her hand. "I think you are a noble young man to save Maud, and would be pleased to have you call at my house—after you leave Mr. Bruin's place. My name is Mrs. Kennington, and I live in the white house on Eagle Lake, to the north of here. Any one can tell you where the place is."

"Yes, ma'am," answered Larry. He wondered why the lady wished him to call.

The lady took another good look at the youth. Then she stepped to a nearby rock, mounted her horse and galloped off.

"By jinks! this is strange!" murmured Larry, as he gazed after her. "She looked at me as if she was trying to read my very thoughts. And there is something in her face that makes me think I have seen her before. But, pshaw! that's only a notion."

Larry waited until the lady had disappeared from view, and then he hurried along the stream until he reached the bridge which had been mentioned to him.

Although he was dripping wet and had lost his hat, he was not particularly down-hearted, and as he walked along he whistled the air of one of the latest popular songs.

Soon the boy heard the rattle of wheels. He looked along the road and saw Howard Bruin approaching, seated on a buckboard.

"I drove around to see what had become of you," said the artist, who had put on a dry suit, and the horse's head was turned back over the road he had come.

It did not take long to reach the artist's residence. Once there, Howard Bruin hunted up a suit and some underclothing for Larry and made the boy put them on.

"They are not the best in the world, but they are better than your old ones, and I want you to keep them," he said.

When Larry had dressed himself he had to tell the story of what had occurred on the other side of the stream, at the point which had been out of Howard Bruin's sight. The artist listened with close attention.

"You mustn't expect much from Mrs. Noxwell," he said. "She is known as the meanest woman in this county."

"I don't want anything," replied Larry promptly. "I didn't do the girl a service for what I could get out of it."

"Well, Mrs. Noxwell could well afford to do the handsome thing by you—she's rich enough; but I doubt if she does anything."

"Perhaps I won't let her do anything, even if she tries. Do you know this Mrs. Kennington?"

"Not very well. I understand, though, that she is a very fine lady."

"She asked me a pile of questions."

"I suppose she was curious to know something concerning such a hero, and——"

"Hold on, Mr. Bruin. I'm no hero."

"Yes, you are."

"Not much. I'm an everyday boy, down on my luck. And, say!"

"What now?"

"That barn isn't cleaned up yet. I'm going down and finish up the job."

"Very well, Larry. And you can stay to dinner if you wish."

"Thanks; I never refuse a meal. It's my one weakness. When you want me you can whistle." And without further words Larry left the house, breaking out into a lively whistle as soon as he was out-doors.

"An odd sort, but a boy to my liking," thought Howard Bruin. "I wish I had work for him here, for I would like to study him. I must help him, since Cousin Percy treated him so meanly."

Once down in the barn, Larry set to work with a will. The structure was cleaned in every part, and then he began on the harness, polishing up the metal pieces until they shone like mirrors, and oiling the

leather work. He was just finishing up when there came a loud whistle from the house.

"Can't be dinner time yet," he thought, as he put the last of the harness away.

As he approached the house he saw an old colored man sitting on the porch bench, talking to Howard Bruin.

"Larry, here's a messenger to see you," said the artist. "This is Abe Jackson. He works for Mrs. Noxwell."

"Am yo' de young gen'man wot saved Miss Maud?" asked the negro, rising.

"Well, I did something of that sort," replied Larry modestly.

"Den, Mrs. Noxwell tole me to tell yo' dat she'd be mighty pleased if yo' would cum up to de house an' call on her."

Larry looked at Howard Bruin as much as to say, "What shall I do?"

"You may as well go, Larry," said the artist. "Don't let what I said hold you back."

"All right, then," returned Larry, and a few minutes later he and the colored man were on the way.

CHAPTER III

LARRY LEARNS SOMETHING

LARRY found the negro a talkative person, and on the road gained considerable knowledge concerning Mrs. Noxwell and her only daughter Maud.

"She am a werry close pussun," said Abe Jackson. "I reckon she's about de closes' pussun yo' kin meet in a day's trabels."

"What does she want of me?" questioned Larry.

"Dat I can't say. She t'inks a heap ob dat gal Maud, and mebbe she wants to show yo' her 'preciation ob de situation."

"I don't want anything of her," returned the boy briefly.

"Well, I reckon wot she gibs yo' won't break yo' back to carry away," grinned Abe.

Larry found the Noxwell mansion a very fine one. It fronted on the main road, while the rear of the spacious grounds sloped down to the water.

Abe Jackson ushered Larry into a magnificently-furnished hallway and motioned him to a seat.

"I'll have to do something for the boy," Larry heard a high-pitched and disagreeable voice say in a back

room. "It won't look well if I don't. The neighbors would all talk about me."

"He looked like a nice boy, but I guess he was a tramp," came the reply, in the voice of the girl Larry had saved.

"A tramp? Well, we'll soon see. If he's merely a tramp, I'll give him a dollar and his dinner and let him go."

The voices suddenly ceased, and there was a rustle of silk.

"She's just what Mr. Bruin said she was," thought Larry. "I want nothing from her—wouldn't take it if I was starving."

Larry was kept waiting for nearly ten minutes. Then Abe Jackson came and ushered him into the parlor.

"Here is de young gen'man, Mrs. Noxwell," he said, and disappeared.

"So you are the young man who—ah—assisted my daughter after she had fallen into the water," said Mrs. Noxwell, surveying Larry sharply from head to foot.

"Well, I did help her a little," responded the boy briefly.

"Of course Maud might have saved herself, but I am very thankful to you for—ah—what you did."

"You are welcome, madame."

Larry's brief speech seemed to arouse Mrs. Noxwell,

and again she looked him over from head to foot. Then a slight frown rested on her unusually high forehead.

"Do you—that is, are you employed around here?" she said.

"No, madame, I'm out of a job."

"Do you belong in Cleveland?"

"Well, that's the last town I was in, but I came from Philadelphia."

"Ah, I see, and out of employment. Too bad! Have you had—ah—had dinner?"

"Not yet. I am to dine with Mr. Bruin, but came over here because your man said you wished to see me."

"Mr. Bruin? Are you—what brings you to his place?" cried Mrs. Noxwell, and by her manner it was plain to see that there was no love lost between herself and the artist.

"Fortune, madame. And I find him a very nice man," added Larry, who thought he saw a way of "getting square" for the insulting remarks she had let fall concerning him.

"He may be—to some. I have a different opinion," replied the lady haughtily. "But that has nothing to do with the matter at hand. As you are to dine with him, it will be useless to ask you to dine here. But I wish to reward you for your slight services to my daughter." Here Mrs. Noxwell brought out her purse. "Allow me to present you with this bill in her behalf."

And she held out a dollar bill toward Larry.

"No, thank you, I don't wish it," he replied, drawing back.

If ever there was a surprised woman that woman was Mrs. Amanda Noxwell. She could not believe that she had heard aright.

"Did you—did you say you didn't wish it?" she asked.

"That's it, madame."

"But—but——"

"It was only a slight service—not worth paying for," returned Larry, with a fine sarcasm which was entirely lost on the would-be lady before him.

"Yes, but you—don't you need the money, young man?"

"Yes—we all need money," Larry laughed. "But I prefer to work for what I get. I don't live on charity."

Something in Larry's tone caused Mrs. Noxwell to spruce up.

"Young man, are you—what do you mean?" she demanded.

"Just what I said."

"You are impertinent."

"Then what did you want to offer me a dollar for? I'm not in need of your money. Did you wish to see me about anything else?"

"Really, you are the rudest young man I ever saw!"

she returned tartly. "A tramp, and won't accept a dollar from one who wishes to do you a great service."

"I prefer to stand on my own feet, madame; that's all."

"Very well, then. But I can see your idea. You wanted me to increase the amount. But I won't do it. You didn't do much. Any one could have done it."

"Is there anything else you wish to see me about?"

"Certainly not."

"Then I'll take pleasure in leaving your place. Good-day."

Mrs. Amanda Noxwell merely looked at him, an expression intended for deep scorn upon her face. A second later Larry was out of the mansion and on his way back to Howard Bruin's residence.

"Well, she's the worst I ever struck!" he declared to himself. "She made me mad as soon as she opened her mouth. I wouldn't want to work for her. I'll wager Abe Jackson has no picnic of it."

When he arrived at the artist's house he found dinner just being served by the housekeeper. Howard Bruin smiled at him as he entered.

"Did you have a nice time?" he asked, as he motioned Larry to a seat at the table.

"She is a—tartar!" burst out Larry. "She thought she was going to do something big by offering me—what do you think? a dollar! It wasn't the money, but her manner would provoke a saint."

"You are right there, Larry; I know her like a book. I once had a lawsuit with her over some property along the river, and I found out just what she was."

"I hope you bested her?"

"I did. I was in the right, and I won the case. But she fought it tooth and nail to the end. Another case is still pending."

"And now you are bitter enemies."

"Worse than that. She has circulated stories about me, and she has made some folks in this neighborhood believe that I was not honest—as I told you when we first met."

"Well, such a woman is worse than a serpent," declared Larry.

How true his words were to prove will be shown in the chapters which follow.

Howard Bruin was so taken with Larry's manner that when the midday meal was over he invited the boy to go fishing with him, saying he could stay at the place over night if he so wished.

"And to-morrow I'll drive to Cleveland with you and see if I can't get you some sort of a situation," the artist added.

This proposition just suited the boy, who was growing weary of tramping from place to place looking for a situation, and he did not hesitate to accept the kind offer.

"I'm in no mental condition to work, so I'll knock off for the day," Howard Bruin observed. "We'll go up to Eagle Lake and try our luck."

"Eagle Lake?" observed Larry. "That's the sheet of water upon which Mrs. Kennington's house is situated."

"Yes; I'll point the house out to you on the way to the fishing cove."

The two were soon off, and when Eagle Lake was reached the artist led the way to where a fine flat-bottom boat was moored.

"Can you row, Larry?"

"Oh, yes; I've rowed on the Harlem River, on the Delaware, and on some of the Great Lakes," returned the boy.

He was soon seated at the oars and proved a good stroke.

"There is Mrs. Kennington's residence," said the artist presently, as he pointed to a fine mansion painted pure white, and surrounded by bushes and trees.

Larry looked at the place, and after a moment of silence his brow grew perplexed.

"What's the matter?" questioned his companion. "Anything wrong?"

"I was just thinking, or trying to think," returned the boy slowly. "It seems to me I've seen some place like that before."

"Quite likely. There are a number of such residences scattered throughout the country."

"I don't mean that. I mean that I was thinking I had seen a place exactly like this."

"Were you ever here before?"

"No."

"Humph! Well, there may be such a house on such a lake as this somewhere."

"I suppose that's it."

"A boat is putting off from Mrs. Kennington's dock," observed Howard Bruin, a moment later. "There is a young fellow in it, Gregory Kennington, the widow's only son."

"Then she is a widow?"

"Yes. This Gregory is a good-for-nothing, and I understand he nearly worries the life out of his mother."

"It's a pity his father isn't alive to take him in hand, then."

"That's true. He has it too easy, you see. He ought to be thrown out on his own resources."

"Like myself, for instance," laughed Larry.

"Exactly, Larry. Though you may not know it, roughing it has made a good deal of a man of you."

"I believe you, sir. I've found out I'm not of so great importance, after all, and I know a good thing when I see it—a snap like this, for instance," and again the boy laughed, the man joining.

"You are an odd sort in some ways," he said. "And you—— Here comes Gregory Kennington!"

As Howard Bruin spoke he pointed to a fine row-boat that was headed in their direction. It contained a young man, faultlessly attired in a jaunty outing costume, and smoking a cigarette.

"Hullo!" cried the young man, as he drew closer. "Want to race?"

"Don't care if I do," answered Larry lightly.

"Bet you a dollar I can beat you," went on Gregory Kennington.

"Haven't got a dollar to put up."

The rich boy drew closer, and soon the two boats were going along side by side at a fair rate of speed.

Gradually, however, Larry began to draw ahead.

"Good-by, slow boots!" he cried.

This appeared to make Gregory Kennington very angry, and of a sudden he turned the bow of his craft toward the other boat.

"Look out, you'll run into us!" cried Howard Bruin.

An instant later there came a crash, and the water splashed in all directions. Larry was considerably wetted, and Gregory's boat springing a leak, began to fill.

"What did you do that for?" cried Larry.

"It wasn't my fault, you little fool," answered Gregory Kennington.

“Don’t you dare to call me a fool!” retorted Larry, when, without warning Gregory Kennington reached over with an oar and struck him on the shoulder.

At once Larry arose and started to defend himself with his own oar. The rich boy saw the move and tried to back away. But in doing this he lost his balance and in a trice fell overboard with a loud splash.



Larry arose and started to defend himself. — Page 44.

CHAPTER IV

MORE TROUBLE FOR LARRY

"THERE, that serves the fellow right!" exclaimed Howard Bruin, as Gregory Kennington disappeared for a moment beneath the waters.

"Save me! Don't let me drown!" gasped the young man, as his head bobbed up. "I—I didn't mean anything!"

"Will you behave yourself if we take you in?" demanded Larry.

"Yes, yes!"

"All right, then, climb in. But be careful, or you'll upset the boat, and be worse off than before."

Gregory Kennington would willingly have dumped Howard Bruin and Larry into the lake, but just now he was too anxious for his own safety to think of taking any risk. He caught hold of the gunwale of the flat-bottom boat and was soon on board.

"You—you—what do you mean by knocking me overboard?" he cried, as soon as he could eject the water from his mouth.

"What do you mean by hitting me first?" retorted Larry.

"You ran into my boat!"

"It was your fault!" put in Howard Bruin. "Larry was steering straight ahead, while you turned in. Here, let me help you."

"Rot and nonsense!" stormed Gregory, wiping his face with Howard Bruin's handkerchief. "You'll have to pay for the boat."

"You won't get the price out of me!" laughed Larry. "I told you before that I hadn't a dollar."

"Then Howard Bruin will pay the damages."

"Not a cent!" declared Larry. "Don't you do it, Mr. Bruin."

"I don't intend to," returned the artist calmly. "It was not our fault that the boat was damaged."

"You'll see," grumbled Gregory, and that was all he could say.

"Where do you want us to land you?" asked Larry.

"Land me?"

"Yes. We are not going to take you along."

"How about my boat?"

"We'll take that in tow." And Larry turned the flat-bottom craft toward the waterlogged boat behind them.

"Take me back to our dock," snapped Gregory.

Howard Bruin, who sat in the stern, caught hold of the bow of the other boat, and then Larry pulled for the spot which Gregory had mentioned.

All dripping with water the young man sat in the

bow seat, his face dark and full of hatred. Larry had his back to him and had he dared Gregory would have played some underhand trick upon the boy. But Howard Bruin's eyes were on him and he did not move.

In a few minutes the little dock projecting from the foot of Mrs. Kennington's garden was reached. The artist shoved the damaged boat in between some spiles, and Gregory jumped ashore.

"You haven't heard the last of this!" he cried, shaking his fist at Larry. "I'll get square with you, mind that!"

"Shall I row away?" Larry asked of his companion.

"Yes," replied the artist.

"You think I'll let it go, but I won't," howled Gregory to Howard Bruin. "Just you wait and see!"

They left the young man on the dock shaking his fist at them. It was not long before Larry had pulled out of hearing distance.

"He makes me tired all over," observed the boy, as he headed for the cove the artist pointed out. "He evidently hasn't much of his mother's disposition about him."

"You are right there, Larry. Mrs. Kennington is a perfect lady, in the best sense of the word. I don't see where Gregory gets his manner."

"Perhaps from his father?"

"No; his father was a very fine man, too, so I understand."

The spot selected for fishing was soon reached and then the lines were brought out, fitted up and cast over. Howard Bruin proved himself a thorough fisherman, and in the course of an hour pulled in eight perch of good size. Larry caught five, including the largest of all.

"Good; that's a banner fish!" cried Howard Bruin. "We'll have him broiled for supper."

"It looks to me as if we were going to have a storm," observed Larry, a quarter of an hour later. "What do you think?"

"It may be nothing but wind," returned the artist, looking up at the mass of black clouds sweeping across the sky to the southward. "We often get a blow from that quarter."

Ten minutes later large drops of rain began to fall into the boat. They were scattered at first, but soon settled into a steady downpour.

"What's to do now?" asked Larry, as he turned up his coat collar. "We'll be drenched if we row all the way back to your house."

"Row across to that strip of sandy beach," replied the artist, pointing out the spot mentioned. "We can find a good shelter back of that."

Larry at once took the oars, leaving his companion to pull in such of the lines as were still out. As the boat made its way across Eagle Lake the downpour became greater, while the wind increased in violence.

Once or twice the waves broke over the side and Larry found himself compelled to head for a point some distance above the sandy beach where they had first intended to land.

“That won’t matter,” said the artist, as he saw that the boy was unable to keep the course. “We’ll tie up at the old tree yonder. I know of a place but a hundred feet from there where we can find shelter.”

He had hardly finished when Larry brought the boat up to the tree mentioned. The boy sprang out and in a trice had the craft secured.

“Follow me!” cried Howard Bruin, just as an extra heavy gust of wind and rain set in. “Hurry up, if you don’t want to catch it worse than ever!”

He made a quick dash through the brush, which at this point lined the lake, and Larry was not slow to follow him. Both went crashing through the bushes as fast as the tangled undergrowth would permit.

In three minutes Howard Bruin came in sight of a tumbled-down cottage, standing upon an old and nearly obliterated wagon road. The cottage was dilapidated to the last degree, the porch having rotted and fallen away, and also the door and several of the shutters of the windows.

“We’ll get in here till it’s over,” said the artist, and he rushed into the open front room.

Larry was close upon his heels. Hardly had they

reached the shelter when the storm burst in all of its fury. There were no thunder and lightning, but the wind and rain were terrific, the latter driving far into the cracks of the shelter.

"It's lucky we struck this place," observed Larry, as he shook the water from his hat. "My, but this is a corker!"

"Yes, we should have been drowned out on the lake," returned the artist. "Well, there's one consolation; such a storm as this can't last. It will be over in an hour."

A moment later came a slight lull. During it, Larry was on the point of making some remark concerning the fish they had caught, when voices from a rear room broke upon their ears.

"I told you I wanted fifty dollars to-day," came in rough tones. "Why didn't you bring it over?"

"I couldn't raise it, Pete," was the reply, and both Larry and Howard Bruin started, for the voice was that of Gregory Kennington.

"That an old story, Greg, and it won't wash. Don't you know that you are standing on the edge of a volcano, and that you must do just as I say? Supposing I told folks what I know of you? What would happen then, eh?"

"You wouldn't dare, Pete Lomax!" burst out Gregory Kennington.

"Wouldn't dare? Try me and see. I want money,

and I want it regularly, too; and you're bound to supply me!"

A fierce rush of wind and rain drowned out Gregory Kennington's reply.

Howard Bruin and Larry looked at each other in wonder. What did that strange interview in the next room mean?

"Gregory Kennington has gotten himself into more trouble, it would seem," whispered Howard Bruin to Larry.

"That's the way the talk runs," responded the boy. "Who is the man he is talking to?"

"I don't know. I'll see if I can get a look at him. I don't know that it's just right for us to listen to what they have to say."

"I suppose you're right, sir, but if we show ourselves Kennington will only kick up a row about his boat."

The door to the next room was open a few inches, and through this crack the artist peered. Larry looked over his shoulder.

They saw Gregory Kennington standing near the big fire-place, puffing vigorously away at the end of a cigarette. His face was pale, and it was plain to see that he was considerably disturbed, if not actually frightened.

Close at hand, on a rude bench made of a board nailed on the tops of a couple of boxes, sat a middle-

aged man. His hair was of a reddish tinge, as was also his beard, and his face was repulsive and ill-natured. The man smoked a short brier pipe, which was grasped tightly between two rows of stumpy, yellow teeth. His clothing was of a decidedly "loud" pattern, and he wore a heavy watch chain and several rings.

"I have seen that man in Cleveland," whispered Howard Bruin as he and Larry drew back. "He's a tough-looking customer."

"I've seen him somewhere, too," replied Larry. "It runs in my mind it was in New York, but I'm not sure."

The wind now ceased for a time, and the conversation between Gregory Kennington and his strange companion continued.

"I haven't had a dollar in over two weeks, and I can't stand it," growled the man on the bench. "I don't propose to go without money when you have plenty."

"I can't get much cash," pleaded Gregory. "My mother won't give it to me."

"Make her."

"I can't do that. I tried it once and we had a great row. She almost threatened to put me out of the house."

Pete Lomax laughed coarsely.

"It would be funny if you were put out," he snick-

ered. "But I reckon it won't come to that. She thinks too much of her only precious boy!" and again the man laughed.

"Quit that!" exclaimed Gregory, "unless you want me to clear out at once. I don't like your joking, Pete. Let's talk about something else."

"But how about that money?"

"I'll get what I can for you and give it to you tomorrow morning."

"Where will you meet me?"

"At the old mill on the other side of the lake."

"You won't fail me?"

"No; I'll give you my word. I never went back on you yet, did I?"

"Humph! you wouldn't dare. My hold on you is too good."

Gregory Kennington seemed to wince, and in anger threw away the end of the cigarette and lit a fresh one.

"Have you been doing anything lately, Pete?" he asked, after a pause, broken by another rush of wind and rain.

"Not much. I'm studying up something new."

"In what line?"

"That's my business. I reckon I'll get out of this neighborhood before long."

"It won't do for me to be seen in your company," observed Gregory pointedly, after another pause.

"Well, I suppose that's so," returned Pete Lomax slowly. "You've got to keep up appearances, or the old lady will go back on her darling, eh? Well, as I said before, I'm going to leave soon."

"Where are you going to?"

"Don't know yet. But don't worry; you'll hear from me often enough."

"I suppose so," growled Gregory. "You intend to squeeze what you can out of me right along."

"Haven't I the right?"

To this the young man did not reply. A moment later Pete Lomax started to his feet and moved toward the kitchen door. "I can't waste any more time here," he said. "Come on, it's breaking away."

"I don't want to get wet again," growled Gregory. "I've been wet once to-day, through and through."

"How was that?"

"A young tramp ran into my boat, and I went overboard."

The two then passed out of the cottage, and Larry and Howard Bruin heard no more.

"Well, I declare!" burst out the artist. "I never thought this of Gregory Kennington, as bad as I know him to be. What a worthless character he must be!"

"And what a scamp that Lomax is," added Larry. "He's a bad man for any one to make a friend of."

"There is some mystery between the pair," Howard Bruin resumed, after reflection. "Lomax appears to

have some hold upon Kennington. He must know some secret concerning the young fellow's doings."

"The secret must be a questionable one or Gregory wouldn't be so anxious to keep it from being known."

"Gregory pretends to be quite a sport. Perhaps he, too, is not fair in his dealings."

"It's a shame that a fellow with the advantages he has wouldn't make better use of them," said Larry somewhat bitterly. "I would just like to be situated half as well as he is."

The pair soon left the cottage and make their way down to the bank of the lake. The storm had cleared off as quickly as it had gathered, and overhead the sun was striving to break through the masses of fleeting clouds.

Larry shoved the boat off and wiped the seats dry with a sponge taken from the stern locker. Then Howard Bruin leaped in and they started on the return. The trip was an uneventful one, and inside of an hour they were safe once more at the artist's summer home.

Maggie, the housekeeper, eyed the string of fish with sparkling eyes.

"A fine catch, sure!" she said. "And ain't this fellow a big one?"

"That's Larry's haul," said Howard Bruin. "We'll have him for supper, Maggie."

"Yes, sir."

"I have an idea," said Larry, when the two were

alone, "if I can't strike a job in Cleveland, I might try my luck fishing in the lake and selling what I caught."

Howard Bruin thought for a moment. "That would be better than doing nothing," he said. "Of course, you wouldn't make a fortune, but you might do quite well during the summer season, supplying fish to folks in Cleveland and up at the summer hotels."

"The trouble is I haven't a boat."

"I'll lend you mine, and you can have all the lines and other traps, too. I don't go fishing more than once a month."

"Well, if you'll loan me the things, I'll agree to supply you with all the fish you wish, free of charge. That's fair, isn't it?"

"Yes, Larry, but I would prefer to buy the fish from you."

"Then I won't take the boat," returned the boy, with some of the spirit he had exhibited when Howard Bruin had first discovered him resting in the barn.

"You won't?"

"No; I want to pay my own way. You've done enough for me already."

"Well, do as you like. But where are you going to put up?"

"I don't know, but I reckon I can find a cheap room somewhere, and I'll board myself."

"There is a furnished room upstairs in the barn,

built for a hired man who left me six months ago. If you wish to sleep there you are welcome to do so."

"Thank you, that will save me the price of the room."

"And you must take your meals at the house."

"But I don't want them for nothing—not as long as I can possibly make enough to pay for them."

"Well, you shall work out the pay around the house, doing odd jobs when you are not fishing. All supposing you can't get a situation in town."

And so it happened that this matter was settled, for on going to Cleveland Howard Bruin was unable to obtain a situation for Larry, although there was every prospect of the boy getting an opening in the fall.

Larry's first week on the lake netted him three dollars and a half. He sold his fish at three of the summer hotels situated among the hills on the south shore, and received standing orders which promised very well.

"Not so bad for a start," he told himself. "It's better than tramping around, looking for a job. And perhaps I'll do much better after the folks around here know me." And after that he kept at his work steadily, day in and day out. There was not a lazy bone in Larry's entire make-up, which was greatly to his credit.

The boy could not help but think of Gregory Kennington and Pete Lomax, and of what he had over-

heard, but, strange to say, he saw nothing further of the unworthy pair.

“I suppose they met at the old mill,” Larry thought. “Well, it was not particularly my business, I’ve got my own affairs to attend to.” And he dismissed the matter from his mind.

CHAPTER V

A STRANGE HAPPENING

"HULLO, there, young fellow!"

It was nearly a month later and Larry was rowing along the north shore of Eagle Lake one morning when the hail came to his quick ears. He looked up and saw a rather shabby man standing on a flat rock, waving his hand vigorously.

"Hullo!" returned the boy. "What's wanted?"

"Will you take me across the lake, boy?" returned the man quickly.

Larry hesitated. He was not above doing a favor, but it was quite a pull across the lake, and to him just then "time was money."

"I'll give you a quarter," went on the man, as he saw the boy hesitate.

"I'll do it," replied Larry promptly.

"Then row in without delay. I'm in a big hurry."

"All right, sir."

Larry turned the head of the boat toward shore, and in a couple of minutes sheered up alongside of the rock. The man at once jumped into the boat, giving a hasty glance over his shoulder as he did so.

"Do you see that clump of poplars over there?" he asked, pointing somewhat slantingly across the lake.

"Yes."

"Well, I want to go there, and row as hard as you can."

"Want to catch a train on the mountain road?" questioned Larry, as he started on the journey across the water.

"What business is that of yours?" exclaimed the man fiercely. Then his manner changed suddenly. "Excuse me for being so rough, but I'm all put out to-day."

Larry said nothing. His passenger sat on the stern seat, so that the boy had a full view of his face. He noticed that the lines around the mouth and eyes were unusually hard and that the man had a scar near his right ear.

"Sizing me up pretty well, eh?" questioned the passenger abruptly, as he suddenly raised his heavy eyebrows and shot a keen glance at Larry.

"Oh, not particularly," responded the boy coolly. "I'm something of a stranger around here and I want to learn the faces of the people in the neighborhood."

"Well, it won't do you any good to study me," said the strange passenger, with a short laugh, which, however, was strained.

"Why?"

"I'm a stranger here, and it's more than likely I'll never come back."

To this Larry made no reply. In fact, he was now exerting all of his strength to row the boat across in the shortest space of time.

The mysterious passenger said no more for the time being. Occasionally he would turn his head and look back, and he did this in such a sly fashion that Larry's suspicions were aroused.

"I must get to Chicago without delay," said the passenger abruptly. "I received a telegram this morning urging me to come. I am watching for a friend who was to accompany me, but I reckon he's gone back on me."

"Did he know you were coming this way?"

"Certainly."

Again Larry was silent. He wondered how the man could make an appointment to cross the lake from the rocks they had just left, when it was only by chance that he had procured passage across.

The man carried no luggage further than a small hand satchel, which he had deposited on the seat beside him. As has been noted, he was rather shabby, and now Larry noticed that he looked as if he had neither washed himself nor combed his hair that morning.

A few minutes later the shore on the other side was reached. On the instant the man caught up his satchel and leaped to the ground.

"So long, boy," he said.

"Hold on; haven't you forgotten something?" called out Larry, following him.

"What's the matter with you?"

"You promised me a quarter for this job."

"So I did. Excuse me; here you are, if you've got change for a dollar."

The man brought forth a silver dollar and Larry dove down into his pocket for the change.

At that moment a wild cry came from the other side of the lake. Larry looked across and saw three men running along the shore as if searching for a boat.

"Is that your friend?" he questioned. "If it is, I'll go and bring him over."

The boy received no reply to his question and turned to see why his late passenger had not answered. To his intense surprise the shabby-looking man had disappeared.

"Hullo, what does this mean?" thought Larry.

"Where are you?" he called out.

A crashing in the bushes in the direction of the road which led to the nearest station was the only reply the boy received. He followed the sound, and, on reaching the road, was just in time to perceive the man hurrying toward the depot as fast as his long legs would carry him.

"Well, he's in too much of a hurry," said Larry to himself, as he walked back to his boat. "Perhaps he

received a telegram that somebody was dying. He looked considerably worried."

When the boy reached his boat he saw that the three men on the other shore were still walking up and down as if searching for something.

"I'll row over and see what it means," was Larry's resolve, and he was soon propelling the craft across Eagle Lake at a good rate of speed.

"Hi, hi!" called out two of the men, as soon as he came within hailing distance.

"What's wanted?" asked Larry, as he gave a final stroke and then unshipped his oars.

"Come in here."

Larry allowed the boat to touch the rocks, and the three men gathered around him instantly.

"See anybody strange around here?" demanded the leader of the party.

"Yes, a man. I just rowed him over to the other side."

"Did he have a big bag with him?"

"No, only a small satchel."

The three men looked disappointed.

"Maybe we're on the wrong track," said one.

"There might have been a couple of them, officer," put in another.

"And they divided the spoils," added the third.

"Where did that man go that you took across?" demanded the one called officer.

"He ran for the railroad station," replied Larry. "Was there anything wrong about him?"

"Mrs. Noxwell's house was robbed last night, and it's most likely he's one of the thieves."

"Robbed!" ejaculated Larry. "Did the thieves steal much?"

"Quite a good bit. We haven't the full particulars yet."

"Maybe that was one of the thieves," went on the boy. "He was in a fearful hurry to get across the lake."

"How did you come to take him over?"

Larry related the particulars of the meeting. The officer and the other two men listened with interest.

"Take me over without delay," said Officer Angus when Larry had finished. "You may go back to the house," he added to his companions.

The passage across the lake was soon accomplished, despite the fact that Larry's arms ached from the unusual strain. When they reached the clump of poplar trees Larry pointed out the direction the shabby stranger had taken. Curiosity led the boy to tie up and follow Officer Angus to the road and then on to the railroad station, less than half a mile distant. The depot reached—it was but a small affair, being used only during the summer months—they looked around eagerly for some trace of the fugitive. He was nowhere in sight.

"He's gone, that's certain," came from Larry.

"There was a train left here ten minutes ago," said the officer. "He might have taken that. I will interview the depot agent."

When this individual, who had entire charge of tickets and baggage, was appealed to he shook his head.

"No such man around here," he said decidedly.

"But he must have come this way," returned Larry.

"Didn't see him, and I watched every one who got aboard. There were just six passengers—two old men, a boy, and three ladies."

Several others standing around were appealed to, but every one shook his head. Not one had seen the shabby-looking stranger, and all were certain that he had not boarded the train.

"Well, if that's the case, then he merely came this way to throw me off the track," observed Larry. "He probably knew that I was curious to know what became of him."

"Humph!" returned Officer Angus. "See here, boy, what's your name?"

"Larry Curly."

"Where do you live?"

"I have a room in Mr. Howard Bruin's barn. I am on the lake catching fish most of the time."

At the mention of Howard Bruin's name the officer gave a low whistle.

"So you live with Howard Bruin, eh?"

"In his barn."

"Does he board you?"

"Yes."

"How long have you boarded with him?"

"Only a short time, sir."

"Humph! Where did you come from?"

"That's my own business."

The officer stared at Larry for this imprudent statement, and then caught him by the arm.

"See here, boy," he cried. "You just come along with me."

For the moment Larry was dumfounded. He tried to back away, but Officer Angus' grip upon him was a good one, and it held.

"Let go of me!" cried the boy. "I haven't done anything wrong."

"Perhaps not, but your manner is mighty suspicious," was the officer's cool response.

"I don't see in what way," retorted Larry hotly.

"I asked you where you came from, and you refused to answer. Ain't that suspicious?"

"Well, perhaps it is. I was tramping around looking for work when I struck this region."

"A tramp, eh?"

"I suppose most folks would call me that. But I never begged or stole anything. I was always willing to work for whatever I got."

"Humph! What are you doing for a living here?"

"Mr. Bruin said I could have his boat and lines, and I catch fish for the hotels. It pays me three or four dollars a week."

"Humph! I should suppose the boarders would catch their own fish."

"They do sometimes. If it wasn't for that I could earn more."

"Well, that's not here nor there. You rowed that thief across the lake, and I want you to come and give an account of yourself."

"I hope you don't think I was concerned in that robbery!" cried Larry, his quick temper beginning to rise.

"I don't say that. But if you're as honest as you pretend to be, you'll help us get on the track of the culprits."

"I'll do that willingly."

"Then come back to the other side of the lake. We'll go to Mrs. Noxwell's house."

"But are you not going to find that stranger?" questioned Larry, somewhat astonished at the officer's proposition that they leave the vicinity.

"No; I'll get one of the men to start a hunt for him. They'll bag him sooner or later, if he's around."

The last words were uttered with a significance which was not lost upon Larry. He readily understood that

the officer suspected that the story concerning the mysterious stranger was not true.

Officer Angus called one of the depot loungers to his side and gave him directions concerning the search. Then he requested Larry to go back to the boat with him.

The boy marched back willingly. Not for one moment did he wish the guardian of the law to imagine that he was trying to shield any one or that he had anything to do with the robbery.

"By the way," said Officer Angus carelessly, while Larry was again at the oars. "Did you have a talk with Howard Bruin last evening?"

"No, sir."

"How was that?"

"Mr. Bruin went off before I came back from my trip to the hotels with my fish."

"Didn't you see him last evening?"

"No, sir; I went to bed before he got back."

"Humph!" The officer compressed his lips. "Did you see him at breakfast this morning?"

"Oh, yes."

"Did he say where he had been the evening before?"

"He started to spend the evening at the house of a friend in Cleveland."

"But he did not?"

"No; the friend was not at home."

"And then Mr. Bruin came home."

"I suppose so. As I said, I didn't see him."

The officer said no more. Larry watched him curiously, wondering what could be passing in his mind.

As soon as the shore was reached a man came running toward them. It was one of the two Officer Angus had left behind.

"Did you get that man?"

"No."

"I thought you wouldn't."

"Why?"

"I reckon there wasn't any man to get."

"By jove! I had the same idea!" exclaimed Officer Angus. "But what makes you think——"

"Come on up to the house. Mrs. Noxwell has made a most important discovery."

"She has? What is it?"

"She won't tell until you come. But she said it would be time thrown away to run after strangers."

"Has she spotted the thieves?"

"I reckon she has."

Larry listened to this conversation with keen curiosity. He now turned to Officer Angus.

"You can say what you please; I took a stranger across the lake, and that's all there is to it."

"Well, I haven't said that you didn't," snapped the officer. "But more than likely he wasn't the man we

want. However, tie up your boat and come up to Mrs. Noxwell's."

The rowboat was made fast to an overhanging tree, and, between the officer and the other man, Larry marched up a side road which led to the beautiful grounds surrounding Mrs. Amanda Noxwell's residence.

Half a dozen people were about, all anxious to learn the particulars of the robbery which had been committed. Among the crowd was Abe Jackson, who was doing his best to convince folks that he "didn't hab nuffin' to do wid dat terribul fing, nohow!"

"Why, where did you find that boy?" demanded Mrs. Noxwell, on catching sight of Larry.

"On the lake, ma'am," replied Officer Angus; and in a few brief words he told his story.

"It's a good thing you brought him with you," said Mrs. Amanda Noxwell. "It's a wonder he came along."

"He was kind of scary at first," was the officer's reply.

"I would think so," said Mrs. Noxwell coolly.

Then she turned upon Larry suddenly.

"Now, young man, what have you to say for yourself?"

"I don't know that I am called on to say anything," retorted Larry, who did not like being addressed in such a sharp manner.

"Oh, indeed!" she sneered. "Perhaps you fancy you can face me down!"

"I don't know what you mean. I know nothing of this robbery further than that I rowed a mysterious stranger, who was in a fearful hurry, across the lake."

"You are a bad boy, and I knew it the day you called here. You have had a splendid chance to injure me by helping the man who has taken you in."

"Won't you explain matters, Mrs. Noxwell?" asked Officer Angus, while all the others present gathered around Larry and the lady.

"I will," returned Mrs. Amanda Noxwell in a loud voice. "I have discovered clews in this house which prove conclusively that this robbery was committed by Howard Bruin, and I have ample reasons for believing that he was assisted in his nefarious work by this boy!"

CHAPTER VI

FOR AND AGAINST

ALL who had assembled in the room of the mansion listened with breathless interest to Mrs. Amanda Noxwell's astonishing statement.

For the instant after she had declared that she had clues which implicated Howard Bruin and reasons to think Larry had assisted the artist, no one spoke.

Larry was the first to break the silence.

"Mrs. Noxwell, do you really mean what you say?" he gasped.

"I most certainly do," returned the lady of the mansion in icy tones.

"That Mr. Bruin robbed your house?"

"Yes, and that you assisted him, too."

Larry's face flushed crimson. Then he strode forward with clinched fists.

"Mrs. Noxwell, you are a woman, so I'll not touch you. But if you were a man and insinuated that either I or Mr. Bruin was a thief, I'd—I'd——"

"Here, here, none of that!" cried Officer Angus, catching the boy by the arm. "There's to be no fighting done here."

"Don't worry; I won't lay a finger on her," retorted Larry. "She isn't fit to touch."

"Oh, you—you viper!" shrieked Mrs. Noxwell, who had shrunk back when Larry first advanced upon her. "Officer, will you not protect me from insults?"

"He had better protect me from them," put in Larry. "I am the one insulted. What right have you to say that Mr. Bruin is the thief and that I helped him?"

"I have good reasons," snapped the lady of the house.

"I was not near your place, and I am certain Mr. Bruin was not, also."

"Perhaps, Mrs. Noxwell, you had better bring out your clews," suggested Officer Angus, somewhat impressed by Larry's determined stand to stick up for himself and his one friend.

"I will. Here is one of them. Look at it and examine the initials."

As the lady of the mansion spoke she brought from the folds of her wrapper a large linen handkerchief and handed it to the officer. He inspected it as directed.

"Here are the initials 'H. D. S. B.' in one corner," he said slowly.

"Exactly; Howard D. S. Bruin," returned Mrs. Amanda Noxwell triumphantly.

"Are you sure those are his initials?" asked Officer Angus.

"Yes."

"Do you know if they are—if this is his handkerchief?" went on the official, turning to Larry.

"Yes, those are his initials," returned the boy slowly. "But that may not be his handkerchief."

"Pooh! Do you think any one else around here has those particular initials?" sneered Mrs. Noxwell.

"It's not very likely," replied the officer.

"And is that all the proof you have against Mr. Bruin?" spoke up Larry quickly. "Only a handkerchief, which might have been dropped by any one, and picked up by any one."

"I have other proof," snapped Mrs. Amanda Noxwell tartly. "As some of the men here know, I was getting ready to begin a lawsuit against Howard Bruin."

"I thought you had one with him, and he won," said Officer Angus.

"So I did; but this is a second, far more important than the first. Well, in the chest which contained much of the silver plate that was carried off, and also the jewels which I intended to have reset, was a box containing the most important papers concerning this question of the disputed land, an old deed and a copy of a will with testifications. This box was broken open and those papers are gone."

The officer elevated his eyebrows.

"They would be of great value to Howard Bruin?"

"Yes, and to no one else. An ordinary burglar would have left them behind."

"That is important, certainly."

"Oh, there isn't the slightest doubt in my mind but that Howard Bruin is the thief!" declared Mrs. Amanda Noxwell.

"But if he wanted the papers why did he steal the plate and jewels?" asked one of the men Larry had first met on the lake shore.

"He did that to throw off suspicion. He wanted the robbery to look like an ordinary one."

At this Officer Angus nodded his head approvingly.

"I see. Mrs. Noxwell, you have a long head."

"You are wrong," cried Larry. "I'll stake my life on it that Mr. Bruin had nothing to do with this robbery. He is far too honest to do anything of the sort."

"Your word doesn't count," sneered Mrs. Noxwell. "I have not spoken of your part in this transaction yet."

"Me? What supposed clew have you against me?"

"A better one than you perhaps imagine."

"I have not been near your place since that day you asked me to call."

"I think differently."

"What makes you think this boy was a party to the theft?" put in the officer.

"I will tell you. Last evening, when it was growing dark, I happened to go into the room where the plate

was stored. As I entered I saw somebody at the window, looking into the room. It was a young man."

"Not me!" cried Larry.

"I think it was he. I was going to ask the intruder what he wanted, when he turned and fled down the garden path. I hurried out of the house and over to the lake, and there I saw this boy in a boat, rowing away at the top of his strength."

"That is not true!" cried Larry. "I was not here."

"I saw you in the boat, and so did Jackson, my man."

"'Deed I did," put in the colored man. "I knowed him by dat hat and coat, suah!"

"It is true I was on the lake in this vicinity," cried Larry; "but I was not ashore."

"It certainly looks black for you," said Officer Angus. "Are you positive it was him looked into the window?" asked the officer with a total disregard for grammar.

"Who else could it be?" returned Mrs. Noxwell. "I saw no one in the garden, and when I reached the lake his boat was the only one in sight for a quarter of a mile."

The officer shook his head.

"And, therefore, I want this Larry Curly arrested," went on Mrs. Amanda Noxwell, with great asperity. "And you must lose no time in arresting Mr. Howard Bruin also."

"If we can find him," said one of the men.

"Why, what do you mean!" cried the lady, turning quickly to him.

"I wanted to see him about some trees this morning, and his housekeeper said he had gone off, and she couldn't say when he would be back."

"He has not run away, you may be sure of that!" burst out Larry. "And you had better wait and hear his side of the affair before you condemn him. Mrs. Noxwell's story of the stolen papers may not be true."

"You—you—wretch!" burst out the lady of the house furiously. "How dare you say such a thing!"

"I have as much right to my opinion as you have to intimate that Mr. Bruin and myself are thieves."

"Why, you are nothing but a—a tramp!"

"Hardly; but I might be if every one treated me as you did."

During the latter part of this conversation Maud Noxwell had been edging her way to her mother's side. She now caught her parent by the arm.

"Mamma, don't forget that he saved me from drowning," she whispered.

For an instant a change came over the face of the lady of the house. Then it became as tightly drawn as before.

"I offered to reward him for that, Maud. I don't believe he did as much as you claim. You could have gotten out of the river alone had you tried."

"I doubt it, mother; the current was too strong."

"Well, that's a thing of the past. I must get back what was stolen."

"But don't be harsh, mother," pleaded the girl. "He looks like an honest boy."

"I know what is best, Maud. You had better keep quiet. This is no affair in which you are called to interfere."

The dutiful daughter shrank back, but not before Larry had given her a grateful look for her kind words in his behalf.

"Yes, Mr. Angus, I wish you to arrest him, and then hunt up Howard Bruin and get back the stolen things," continued Mrs. Noxwell in a loud voice.

"We'll recover the things if the deed can be done," replied the officer. "And if you make a charge against the two, why, I can't do otherwise than arrest them."

"See here, have you found no other clew than that handkerchief?" asked Larry.

"Nothing," returned Mrs. Noxwell.

"Have you looked carefully?"

"Yes."

"I went over the ground myself," added the officer.

"So did I," put in Abe Jackson. "Dar wasn't nuffin' to see but dat handkerchief."

"May I ask how the robbery was committed?"

"Hadn't you better make a confession?" sneered Mrs. Noxwell.

"I have told the whole truth," said Larry, trying to keep down that hasty temper of his.

"Oh, no doubt; but I imagine a few days behind the bars will bring you to your senses."

"And perhaps when I am able to prove my innocence, you will be sorry you called the fellow who saved your daughter's life a thief," returned Larry, giving her a parting shot, which was not without its effect upon those around. "Now, I am ready to go with you, Mr. Angus."

Five minutes later Larry and the officers were on their way to the Cleveland jail.

CHAPTER VII

LARRY GETS AN IDEA

THE town of Cleveland, of which we have spoken a number of times, consisted of between four and five thousand inhabitants. It was quite a bustling place, and one that was rapidly advancing, both in population and manufactures.

But though it owned and boasted of half a dozen handsome and substantial buildings, like the post office, town hall and the new theater, the jail at Cleveland was old and dilapidated. There had been considerable talk from time to time of erecting a new prison, but as yet nothing definite had been settled.

This jail was situated in the rear of an office used by the local justice of the peace and police justice, and by the town constables or policemen, of whom Officer Angus was one.

The jail was a long, low, one-story affair, built of brick and stone. The small courtyard around its two sides and rear was surrounded by an eight-foot board fence. The building was situated on a corner lot, so that one of the sides of the tall fence ran along the street.

When Officer Angus and Larry arrived at the jail office they found no one present but the police justice, who was dozing over a morning paper.

"Hello! what's this?" asked the justice, flinging aside the paper and putting on that sharp look with which it was his custom to confront prisoners.

"A prisoner, your honor," returned Angus.

"What's he done?"

"He's suspected of robbing Mrs. Noxwell's mansion," said Angus, and while Judge Raum got out his book of records and began to write, the officer briefly stated the particulars.

He had hardly finished before another constable came in, and soon after the new man and Angus went off to hunt Howard Bruin.

The jail boasted of a man, who was janitor and keeper combined. This man, a person named Darwin, now took charge of Larry.

"I presume you can't furnish bail?" observed Judge Raum, as he finished writing up the record of the case.

"How much do you want?"

"Well, about a thousand dollars will do," was the slow reply.

"I couldn't furnish a thousand cents," returned Larry, with a sinking heart. "But it's a shame to lock me up."

"You will have a full hearing in the morning," was the police justice's reply.

"Come with me," said Darwin, and he led Larry away.

They passed through a long, narrow corridor, and then entered the jail proper. The place was divided into twelve cells, six on either side of the central hallway. Each cell was eight feet square and had in it a small window up near the ceiling, covered with stout iron bars.

"I'll put you in cell six," observed Darwin, as he led Larry to the farther end of the corridor. "There are two drunken men in one and seven, and they kick up too much fuss to be near 'em with comfort."

"Yes, please put me as far from them as possible," returned the boy. "I despise a drunkard, and besides I want to keep quiet and do some thinking."

"Want to own up to what you've done?" and Darwin laughed.

"I have not done anything to own up to. I am innocent."

"Humph! That what they always say, every one of 'em. Why, those two drunks would say they was sober if you asked 'em. It's man's nature to stick out that he ain't done nothing wrong."

And with this bit of philosophy Darwin thrust Larry into cell six and closed and locked the door upon him.

"I'll be on hand at meal times," he said on parting. "So don't worry about being starved."

"I don't feel like eating a mouthful," declared the boy, and he told the truth.

"Your appetite will come back by meal time," laughed Darwin. "It always does, with all of 'em."

The jailer walked away and poor Larry was left alone. The boy surveyed the cell into which he had been thrust and found it rather bare of furniture, containing nothing more than a cot with blankets, and a bench.

Larry sat down on the bench and gave himself up to reflection. The two drunken men Darwin had mentioned began to sing a popular song loudly, but he paid no heed to them. Of what had he been deemed guilty? Was there any possibility that Howard Bruin had done as Mrs. Noxwell charged?

"He can't be guilty," mused Larry. "And as for myself, I know I am innocent. Now, who is guilty?"

Larry could not help but think of the strange man who had been in such a hurry to cross the lake.

"If he had had any more baggage than that small satchel I would say he was guilty beyond a doubt. But he couldn't carry much silver plate in such a small space, that's certain."

Another matter which bothered the boy was the fact concerning the finding of his friend's handkerchief on the scene of the robbery. How had that article come there?

"It's a sure thing Mr. Bruin didn't take it there himself," murmured Larry meditatively. "But if he didn't, who did? The handkerchief didn't blow there of its own account. The fact that the papers were gone proves nothing. Most likely the thief thought they might be of value to him, and took them to examine later."

The handkerchief clew hung in Larry's mind despite all he could do to think of other matters—for instance, his own condition and what he would say when brought out for a hearing. The robbery seemed to hinge upon that bit of linen and that alone.

Suddenly, like a broad sheet of lightning, the memory of what had occurred some time before flashed into his mind. He sprang to his feet and swung his clenched fist in front of him.

"I have it! That's it, sure as fate!" he cried.

He remembered how Gregory Kennington had gone overboard into the lake during their quarrel, and how that young man had been assisted into the boat by Howard Bruin, and he also remembered how Howard Bruin had drawn forth his handkerchief and passed it over to Gregory with which to wipe the water from his face.

"And I'm pretty sure Gregory didn't pass it back, but stuck it in his pocket in his excitement," said Larry to himself. "Is it possible that Gregory is the thief?"

It was hard to believe that the only son of Mrs. Kennington would be so bad. Larry had taken a strange fancy to the lady, and as he thought of the possibilities of the case he found himself sympathizing with her because of her grief should Gregory be found guilty.

"If Gregory is guilty it must be because of the influence of that Pete Lomax," was Larry's conclusion. "Lomax demanded money and threatened to expose Gregory if he didn't get it. I suppose he knows some secret concerning Gregory's foolish doings, and maybe as Gregory couldn't get the cash in any other way he got desperate and robbed Mrs. Noxwell. But if that is so, did he leave the handkerchief behind by accident or design? Really, the whole thing is a puzzle."

In his excitement Larry paced up and down the cell for the remainder of the morning. At one o'clock Darwin brought him a dish of pork and beans, bread, and a cup of coffee. Larry ate a few of the beans, and drank a mouthful of the coffee, and that was all.

"Have they found Mr. Bruin yet?" he asked.

"Not yet," returned Darwin. "I reckon as how he's skipped."

"You are mistaken. Mr. Bruin did not run away. He has too much at stake here; and besides, he's not guilty."

"We'll see," returned the jailer briefly, and once more Larry was left to his own reflections.

The two drunkards had now gone to sleep and the jail was as quiet as a tomb. Two hours passed—a period that seemed to Larry to be two days. Then Darwin once more appeared, followed by a lady. The latter was Mrs. Lucy Kennington.

CHAPTER VIII

LARRY RESOLVES TO INVESTIGATE

LARRY was greatly surprised to see his visitor, more especially after he had been thinking earnestly about the lady. He sprang up from his bench, and his face betokened more than ordinary interest.

Mrs. Kennington was plainly dressed, and carried in her hand a bunch of flowers and some fruit.

"I presume you are surprised to see me," she said in that sweetly sad voice which had made such an impression upon Larry before. "But I make it a rule to call upon the inmates here and at the hospital once a week, and I could not resist the temptation to come and see you, too."

"Thank you, ma'am," returned Larry, somewhat awkwardly, for he hardly knew how to reply to her words.

"I suppose you feel rather lonesome here," went on Mrs. Kennington, as she set the fruit and flowers on the bench, and offered him her hand. "You will accept those from me, won't you?"

"What, that fruit?"

"The fruit and the flowers both. I brought them in for you."

"Indeed, ma'am, you are very kind!" cried the boy. "I didn't expect anything of this sort."

"I suppose not. But as I said, I make this place to be one regularly visited, and I took a particular fancy to you the other day when you saved Maud Noxwell's life."

"You did more than Mrs. Noxwell did," replied Larry bitterly. "She has had me locked up!"

"She claims to have reasons for doing that, Larry. But—but——"

"I wasn't near her house when it was robbed."

"I am glad to hear you say that, and your face looks as if it were the truth. But what of Mr. Bruin—do you know anything of him?"

"I do not. But you can't make me believe that he had anything to do with it."

"It would not seem so, and yet Mrs. Noxwell says the stolen papers were of great importance."

"He wouldn't stoop so low."

"And you have no idea who the guilty party is?"

On the instant Larry's face grew crimson. What should he say? Should he cut this kind lady to the heart by revealing what was in his mind?

"I have an idea," he returned hesitatingly. "But I may be wrong."

"That man you say you took across the lake?"

"That man—and another. But I would rather not speak of that, Mrs. Kennington?"

"Not until you are sure?"

"That's it."

"Well, perhaps it is best. I do not admire the person who accuses another of a crime without some proof."

Again Larry felt his heart beat painfully. How this good lady would suffer, if her only son was found guilty!

"I'll not say a word against him until I am certain he committed the theft," was Larry's mental resolve.

"You are to have a hearing in the morning, I believe?" went on Mrs. Kennington.

"Yes, ma'am."

"I trust you will clear yourself. By the way," she continued, with a shade of anxiety crossing her brow. "You had some difficulty with my son on the lake, I believe?"

"Yes, but I hope that is past."

"His boat was damaged."

"Yes, Mrs. Kennington, but that was not my fault. He ran directly into the boat myself and Mr. Bruin were in. The boat was wrecked and Gregory went overboard later on, but we hauled him in and took him to land."

"Gregory is high spirited," sighed Mrs. Kennington. "Don't imagine I think you were in the wrong. I am sorry to say I can do but little with him so far as controlling his temper and disposition are concerned."

"Well, I've got a red-hot temper myself," replied Larry with a short laugh. "I suppose my remarks made him mad. Is he at home now, may I ask?"

"No, Gregory has not been home since yesterday morning. He said he might take a trip to Chicago for a few days. He goes and comes pretty much as he pleases."

Mrs. Kennington heaved another sigh, and it was plain to Larry that the subject was a painful one to her. Yet he could not resist asking one more question.

"Did he go away alone?"

"I do not know. He has some questionable companions, I believe, but they never come near the house."

"I see. Well, I hope he turns up all right."

There was a significance to these words which Mrs. Kennington did not catch. Larry pitied the rich lady who could do nothing with her wayward offspring, and he wished he could fasten the robbery upon the head of another.

A few minutes later Mrs. Kennington departed, after Larry had thanked her for her kind gift, and the boy was once more left alone.

Somehow he could not touch the fruit and flowers she had brought. It seemed to him that it would not be right. Should he hunt down Gregory and prove him guilty it would be like a blow in the dark at her who wished to befriend him.

By the above it is easy to see that Larry was no common boy. To be sure, having been cast upon the world to earn his own living, he had acquired many rough ways that were not to be admired, but these habits were only on the surface, so to speak; beneath was a heart of gold, as pure and as fine of feeling as one could wish. Surely no common blood flowed in this strange boy's veins.

The remainder of the afternoon wore on, and it speedily grew dark in the jail. Darwin came in with supper, which he left on the bench, and then all was locked up for the night.

Larry slept soundly, considering what was on his mind. At the first appearance of dawn, however, he was up, long before Darwin came to take him to the room where he might wash up and comb his hair.

"Heard anything of Mr. Bruin yet?" asked the boy eagerly.

"No. He was traced to Cleveland, and that's all. Oh, he's skipped, that's certain," replied Darwin, with a decided shake of the head.

For the first time since he had been locked up Larry began to grow uneasy. What did this prolonged absence mean? Surely it could not be that Mrs. Noxwell was right after all in her surmise concerning the artist.

At ten o'clock Larry was led into Justice Raum's court room. He found the place crowded with men,

anxious to hear whatever might be said. Mrs. Noxwell and several other ladies were also present, and near the door sat Mrs. Kennington.

The hearing was a short one, Larry being asked but few questions different from those put to him the day previous. Evidently Justice Raum wished to defer a hearing until Howard Bruin was located.

"But how long are you going to keep me without a trial?" asked Larry.

"Well, not longer than a week, Curly."

"A week!"

"That is not long. I might keep you a month if I wished."

"And will I have to stay in jail a week?"

"Unless you can furnish bail."

"I can't do that. But if you'll let me go I'll give you my word of honor that I won't run away."

"Sorry, my boy, but I can't let you go on your own recognizance."

Then after he had been asked a number of questions about Howard Bruin and his habits, Larry was taken back to jail and the two drunkards were brought out for trial.

The boy was in a downcast and bitter frame of mind as he dropped on the bench once more. A prisoner for a week or longer, and he had done nothing wrong!

"It's not fair!" he cried to himself angrily. "It's not fair. If I was out I would do my best to bring the

guilty party to justice, but what can I do cooped up here? Nothing; nothing at all!"

His hot-blooded indignation was fast coming again to the surface, and springing to his feet he began to pace up and down nervously. If he were only free—if only that prison door which held him in his cell was unlocked!

Involuntarily he glanced toward the door, and walking over he took hold of the bars. Then he gave a start, as if he could hardly believe his senses. The door was unlocked. When Darwin had turned the key the bolt had not slipped into its socket, but just in front of it.

And but a dozen feet away was a door leading to the courtyard, and this door stood partly open to admit fresh air into the hot cells. The way to freedom was clear!

CHAPTER IX

LARRY MAKES ANOTHER FRIEND

For an instant after Larry made the discovery that the cell door was not locked, only one thought filled his mind.

Here was a chance to escape!

Such a chance might not present itself for a long time again; in fact, it was likely never to come, and why should he not take this opportunity to get away?

He reasoned that he could secure no bail, and that he would have to remain behind the prison bars until brought out for trial. Then, when tried, how would he be able to free himself from the charges brought against him?

"Mr. Bruin is gone!" he muttered to himself. "And that makes it look black for him. And he was my only friend!"

But then Larry thought of Mrs. Kennington, and how kind she had been to him, and, with his hand on the cell door, he paused.

"If I run away they will say I am guilty, beyond a doubt," he reasoned to himself. "They will say I unlocked the door, not that I found it open, and they

would put every constable in the county on my track and run me down sooner or later. No, I won't go."

The boy turned from the door, and a moment later dropped upon the bench. The idea of running away had not been given up without a sharp mental struggle, but, somehow, Larry felt the better for it.

Half an hour passed. Then came footsteps in the corridor, and Darwin appeared, followed by Mrs. Kennington.

"I could not resist coming in to see you before starting for home," she said, while Darwin was bringing out his bunch of keys.

"No need for a key, Darwin," said Larry to the jailer. "The door is open."

"What?" gasped the man, and as he pushed against the door, and as it swung in, he added, "Gee—rusalem! how did you open it?"

"You didn't lock it when you left," returned Larry. "The bolt didn't catch."

Darwin grew pale, and then drew a long breath.

"When did you discover this?" he asked slowly, as he entered, followed by Mrs. Kennington.

"A while ago."

"And it was really open?" put in the lady, gazing at Larry with new interest.

"Yes, ma'am."

Darwin gazed into the corridor to where the side

door leading into the courtyard stood open. Mrs. Kennington's eyes followed the look.

"He could have run away easily enough, if he had wanted to," she said somewhat triumphantly.

"I'm afraid that's a fact," replied the jailer soberly. "But what gets me is how I could let the lock slip that way."

"I think that proves he is an honest boy," went on Mrs. Kennington. "Larry, you deserve credit for not attempting to run away when you had such a good chance."

"Well, to tell the truth, I did have a notion of going," replied the boy, blushing in spite of himself. "But I thought it would look black against me, so I didn't go."

"I brought you some more fruit," went on the lady. "But I see you haven't touched the other."

To this Larry did not reply. Mrs. Kennington looked at him strangely. For some reason she could not explain she took a keen interest in this homeless boy.

"It does not seem right to have you locked up here if you are not guilty," she went on. "It is not a very nice place to stay in."

"You are right there," said Larry.

"Supposing——" she paused. "I believe I can trust you, Larry."

"What—what do you mean?" he cried, a strange hope springing up in his breast.

"Supposing I go your bail. Will you give me your word of honor that you will not run away?"

"You are too kind!"

"Answer me."

"I will, certainly. But—but I didn't expect this!"

"I presume not. Many would think me crazy to do such a thing, but for some reason I cannot explain I have taken a sudden fancy to you."

"Thank you."

"Finding the cell door open has made me believe in you more strongly than ever. I will go your bail."

Larry sprang up and grasped her hand. There were tears in his honest eyes.

"I won't forget this, Mrs. Kennington!" he cried. "I will do you a good turn for it some day, mark me. I have been a wanderer so long that I know what it is to be without a friend, so I can fully appreciate this kindness, and—and——"

Larry's heart was too full to say more, and he was compelled for the time to turn away.

"Come into Justice Raum's private office," went on the lady. "We will soon settle this matter."

She led the way, and Darwin quickly followed with Larry in charge.

"Say, don't tell about that door being open, will you?" whispered the jailer on the way. "It might give me a heap of trouble."

"I won't say anything unless I'm compelled to," returned Larry.

They were soon in the private office of Police Justice Raum. It did not take long to acquaint the official with what was desired.

"You're taking a great risk, Mrs. Kennington," said the justice slowly. "You hardly know the lad."

"But I am satisfied that he is honest, and that is enough."

"Well, well, just as you say. I'll fix up a bond and you can sign it, and then he'll be free to go where he pleases for a week."

The justice brought forth his legal paper and went to work. Five minutes later the document was signed by Mrs. Kennington, and Darwin witnessed it, and then the justice turned to Larry.

"You are free for a week from this morning, ten o'clock."

"Thank you, sir, and thank you, Mrs. Kennington. I won't forget this."

"What will you do now, Larry?" asked the lady.

"I want to see if I can't find some real clew to the robbery, and also learn what has become of Mr. Bruin."

"Then you will not come home with me for dinner?"

This invitation was a surprise to Larry. At first he thought of declining, then a sudden idea came into his mind and he hesitated.

"I didn't know you wanted me to come," he said slowly.

"It was just an idea. You might come to dinner with me and tell me something about yourself, and then you can go off on your hunt."

The matter was talked over at some length, and finally the boy accepted the invitation to dine with the lady.

"Perhaps I will learn something concerning Gregory Kennington," he thought to himself. "I wish I could prove him innocent and somebody else guilty; not so much for his sake, but for the sake of his mother."

"We will have a quiet meal together," said Mrs. Kennington, as she led the way to where her carriage was standing. "I doubt if Gregory comes home."

The carriage was a one-seated affair, drawn by a fine-looking team of grays. There was no driver, and Larry at once sprang forward to assist the lady in, and then unhitched the animals.

"It must be sport to drive a team like this," observed the boy, as he placed the hitching strap under the seat and climbed into the vehicle. "My! but I do love good horses!"

"I should think 'most any one would, Larry. Can you drive?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then perhaps you wish to take the reins."

"I wouldn't like anything better, Mrs. Kennington."

"You must be careful, Larry; the horses are high spirited, and you must keep them well in hand."

"I'll do that."

Larry took the reins from the lady's hands, and prepared to start off.

"Hold on there!" shouted a voice from the street corner. "What does this mean?"

Larry looked around and so did the lady, and both saw Gregory Kennington running toward them.

"What are you doing in that wagon?" demanded Gregory roughly. "Get out of there!"

Of course his words were addressed to Larry, but before the boy could reply the mother of the young man spoke up:

"Why, Gregory, do not talk so! Larry Curly is here by my invitation."

"What, that thief!" roared Gregory savagely.

"I'm no thief!" cried Larry hotly, stung by the appellation.

"You are! How did he get out of jail, mother?"

"I went his bail, Gregory."

"Went his bail! Mother, are you clean crazy?"

"No, Gregory, I am not crazy," returned Mrs. Kennington calmly, although it cost her an effort.

"How much was the bail?"

"A thousand dollars."

"He'll run away, and then you'll be out the money," went on the excited young man.

"I think not," replied Mrs. Kennington briefly. "However, this is my affair, Gregory, not yours. Now you have returned, are you coming home to dinner?"

"Not yet. Besides, I don't want to be seen in the company of a thief, even if you do."

And with this retort, Gregory strode off, an angry scowl covering his face.

CHAPTER X

MRS. KENNINGTON'S MANSION

LARRY had listened to the conclusion of the conversation between Mrs. Kennington and Gregory with interest. He was at first inclined to "have it out" with the unreasonable young man, but suddenly changed his mind and remained silent.

"I trust you will excuse this interruption, Larry," said the lady, when Gregory had disappeared. "My son is very rude."

"Never mind, he'll find out his mistake one of these days," returned the boy significantly.

"I trust he will," came from Mrs. Kennington with a sigh. "His actions are the one grief of my life."

"It's the company he keeps that makes him so bad, ma'am. If he got in the right set he'd be good enough."

But although he spoke thus, Larry could not help but think of the conversation he had overheard at the deserted house and of the handkerchief clew. Certainly, matters looked black for Gregory, and the time might come when the young man would have a hard time of it to clear himself.

"But I won't say anything until I am sure he is guilty," was Larry's mental resolve, taken a second time. "I won't worry Mrs. Kennington needlessly after she has been so kind to me."

Soon Cleveland was left far behind and they were bowling along the country road which led to the Kennington mansion. It was a beautiful day, and for the time being Larry forgot his troubles as he sat bolt upright and handled the reins like a trained driver.

"You drive beautifully, Larry," remarked the lady. "You ought to become a driver if you can get nothing better to do."

"Shall I let them out a bit?" questioned the boy, as he held the team in against their will.

"Yes, but watch them, for Tom is very high-spirited at times."

"I'll keep my eye on him, and on his mate, too."

Larry spoke to the team and off they shot at a spanking gait down the road which led to the Kennington mansion.

In less than half an hour they reached the place, and then, leaving Mrs. Kennington at the piazza block, Larry drove around to the barn. Here he met an Irish hostler and gardener named Pat Murphy.

"Sure an' where did yez come from?" asked Murphy, gazing at Larry on the box in astonishment.

"From Cleveland direct," laughed the boy. "Why do you ask?"

"Ain't yez th' b'y that was arristed for stalin'?"

"Yes; but they let me out. I'm not guilty."

"Did yez prove that?"

"No; I am out on bail."

"An' who wint on the bond?"

"Your mistress."

"Mrs. Kennington!" ejaculated the Irishman, staring at Larry with mouth wide open in astonishment.

"Yes."

Murphy gave a long whistle.

"Sure an' she must set a store by yez!" he muttered. "Are yez one of Gregory's friends, I don't know?"

"No, I am not," returned Larry decidedly.

"Thin Oi don't understand it," and Murphy shook his head as he turned to lead the team away.

Larry was about to return to the house when something flashed over his mind and he followed Murphy to the stable door.

"Have you seen Gregory since yesterday?" he asked.

"Oi have not."

"Do you know anything about a friend of his called Pete?"

"Pate? Phat kind of a lookin' man is he?"

As well as he could, Larry described the villainous countenance of Pete Lomax. Murphy listened closely until he had finished.

"Oi know that man!" cried Murphy. "Do yez want to foind him?"

"Has he been here?"

"He don't come to the house, but Oi have seen him down be the boat landin' wid Gregory."

"When did you see him last?"

"Yisterday marnin'."

"He was alone?"

"Yis. Oi guess he was lookin' fer Gregory but couldn't foind him."

"You don't know where he went?"

"No. He said he would wroite to Gregory whin Oi axed him to lave wurrud fer th' young man."

"I see. Well, it's all right."

Larry left the vicinity of the stable in deep thought. He had learned that Pete Lomax had been in the neighborhood the day before. Could it be possible that that rough-looking individual had helped Gregory to commit the robbery?

"Come right in," said Mrs. Kennington, as soon as he approached the piazza.

The two entered the house and a servant relieved Larry of his hat, and later on showed him to the bath room, where he took a brushing up and a wash. By the time he came down dinner was ready and a servant conducted him into the dining room, where Mrs. Kennington was waiting for him.

"You may sit there, Larry," she said, pointing

out a chair to him. "We shall have it all to ourselves."

Larry was perfectly satisfied at this. The table was well filled, and he was not backward in taking what was offered him.

During the meal Mrs. Kennington persuaded him to tell much concerning his wanderings, and was often compelled to smile at his odd manner of presenting his views of certain subjects.

"You are a bright boy, Larry," she declared at last. "It is a great wonder that you have not heard something concerning your past—I mean before you were taken to the hospital."

"I'll run across news of that one of these days. Perhaps I'll go back to New York when matters are cleared up here, and I've got a little money to spend."

"Do you not remember anything concerning your neighbors in the vicinity of the basement in which you were discovered lying sick?"

"Sometimes I think I do, and then again it is like a dream."

"Your sickness has left a cloud on your memory," she said softly. "Perhaps some day a kind Providence will brush it away and you will be able to recall it all."

"I hope what you say may prove true, Mrs. Kennington, for you don't know how it feels to be all alone in the world."

"Poor boy!" she murmured, as she reached over the

table and placed a kindly hand on his shoulder. "But remember, Larry, I will be your friend. Only be honest and upright in all you do."

"I will be, Mrs. Kennington. I never stole a thing, and though I don't claim to be a saint, I never told a deliberate lie in my life."

"I believe you."

"I'm awfully hot-tempered, and wandering around has made me rough in some things, but I mean well."

"You will come out successful in the end, do not fear." Mrs. Kennington drew a long breath. "Is it not strange that I should take such an interest in you?"

"Yes, it is; but I'm very thankful that you do. If it hadn't been for you I would still be in the Cleveland jail. By the way, do you and your son live all alone here?"

"Yes; but of course I have the gardener and the housekeeper and her help."

"You haven't any other sons or daughters?"

"No. I had another boy and two girls, but they all died when they were young. And Mr. Kennington died about the same time."

The lady drew her handkerchief and wiped the tears which were coursing down her cheeks. The scene made Larry feel very sober.

"I am sorry I—I spoke," he faltered.

"Oh, you are not at fault, Larry," she sighed. "I

could bear it if only Gregory would be a better boy. But you have seen how headstrong he is. I cannot make him mind me in a single thing. He makes me give him more spending money than he ought to have, and he threatens all sorts of dire things if I won't give it to him."

"He ought to have a regular master over him, or to rough it for awhile; that would bring him to his senses, perhaps, Mrs. Kennington. He has it too easy here."

"I suppose you are right, Larry, but it would grieve me to death if Gregory should become desperate and do something wrong."

Hardly had the meal been finished when the servant entered bearing a letter for Mrs. Kennington.

"Excuse me, Larry, while I see what this message contains," said she, and tore it open.

"Why, this is really too bad," she cried.

"No bad news, I hope," returned the boy.

"It is from a friend in Carwell, ten miles distant from here. She wishes me to call upon her this afternoon in reference to some work for a fair to be held there next week."

"Can't you go?"

"I do not wish to drive you away, Larry."

"Oh, that's all right. I didn't intend to intrude upon you much longer. But, say, will you drive there?"

"I will get my man to drive."

"If it's all the same, I would like to handle that team again."

"You mean you would like to drive me to Carwell and back?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Very well, then, you shall do it."

CHAPTER XI

A MOMENT OF PERIL

WHILE Mrs. Kennington was preparing herself for the trip to be made, Larry left the house, sought out Murphy, who was behind the barn hoeing corn, and told the Irishman that the carriage and team were wanted.

"Sure an' Oi'll have them in a jiffy," returned Murphy; "but Oi'll tell yez wan thing, me b'y, be careful o' Tom."

"Why?"

"He ain't feelin' well, an' cuts up loike the very Ould Nick, so he does."

"Then perhaps you had better not hook him up."

"There's no other horse to take his place. Jerry is at the blacksmith shop for shoeing, and Gregory rode off wid th' black mare."

"When he went away the other day?"

"Yis."

"And the mare has been gone all this while?"

"Yis. But that's nothing new. He sometimes leaves the animal at the livery stable in Cleveland. And, by the way, Oi see that feller out on the road while yez was to dinner."

"Who?"

"That feller yez call Pate."

"You did?" cried Larry. "Which way did he go?"

"Up that side road over there."

And Murphy indicated the direction with the handle of his hoe.

"Where does that lead to?"

"Carwell."

"Was he alone?"

"Yis. He was looking for Gregory, Oi guess; but whin Oi shouted to him he got out av sight. Say, wot be yez afther wid him?"

"Oh, I want to have a talk with him, that's all," replied Larry, and to avoid being questioned further he left Murphy to hitch up the team.

"Perhaps I'll see this Lomax on the road," thought Larry. "If he has a bundle that looks suspicious I'll stop him, by jinks, if I don't!"

He found Mrs. Kennington ready for the drive, and in a few minutes Murphy brought the turn-out around to the door. Larry was in a hurry to be off, yet he concealed his impatience as best he could. But it did not take the lady long to enter the carriage and give final directions to the housekeeper, who had followed her to the block.

"I will be back by dark," she said. "And if Gregory comes, be sure and have dinner ready for him."

In another minute Larry had the lines in hand, and once again the elegant carriage turned out of the grounds.

"Do you know the way to Carwell?" asked Mrs. Kennington.

"It is on that road, I believe," replied Larry, pointing out the road mentioned by Murphy.

"Yes, about ten miles from here."

"Then I guess I can find it. There are numerous sign-boards around here, I notice."

"I know the way and can direct you. By the way, what is the matter with Tom?"

"Murphy said he was not feeling very well."

"Then he ought to have been left in the stable."

"Perhaps he will be better on the road than standing still. Some horses are, you know."

"That is true, but Tom is so high-spirited that I am rather afraid of him."

"I'll keep him well in hand."

They were soon on the road to Carwell, which at this point was rather rough. Larry kept his eyes open for Pete Lomax, and at last caught sight of a figure resembling the rough character he was after just ahead. He was almost upon the pedestrian when the man turned to see who was coming. Larry saw his face and made sure it was Lomax. Then the man jumped into the bushes and disappeared.

When the carriage passed the spot, Larry looked in

vain for the fellow, who, he had noted, had carried a bundle.

"Better luck next time," thought the boy.

It was not long before the unusually rough portion of the driveway was passed, and they emerged upon an exceedingly smooth stretch of road, lined on either side with bushes and trees.

"Be careful at the bend beyond!" cried Mrs. Kennington suddenly; "they are repairing the road there."

"I'll look out for it," replied Larry.

The spot alluded to was where several large rocks stuck out from the side of a steep hill. The road ran around the base of the largest of the rocks, and at this point was just wide enough to allow the passage of two vehicles.

"They are going to widen the roadway here," observed Mrs. Kennington. "When they have finished it will be a great improvement."

"Yes, it's very narrow," replied Larry. "If three wagons were—— Hullo! what's up now?" and Larry tried to check the team, which was now moving along at top speed.

A man bearing a red flag had leaped into sight and was running toward them at full speed.

"There must be danger of some sort!" cried Mrs. Kennington. "Stop the horses, Larry!—quick!"

"The blast!—the blast!" yelled the man with the

red flag. "Go back! The blast will go off in thirty seconds!"

Larry's face grew a trifle pale. Then he shut his teeth hard and spoke to the horses.

But for some unknown reason, Tom, the high-spirited animal, would not come to a halt. He arose on his hind legs and then broke into a gallop, dragging his mate beside him.

The man with the red flag had scarcely time to leap out of harm's way when the team and the carriage dashed past him. Mrs. Kennington uttered a shriek, and arose to her feet as if to spring from the vehicle.

"Don't jump!" cried Larry. "You'll be killed! I'll try to turn them around. Come, Tom, whoa! whoa!"

"Shall I take the reins?"

"No; but you might speak to him. He knows your voice."

"Why don't you go back?" yelled the man in the road, waving his red flag furiously. "We've got half a pound of dynamite loaded into that rock!"

"Whoa, Tom! Whoa!—that's a good Tom!" called Mrs. Kennington, as soothingly as her agitated state of mind would permit. "Whoa, Tom!"

"Here, take the reins, and I'll get to his head!" said Larry excitedly, as they came almost opposite to the rocks. "We must turn around somehow!"

He passed over the lines and made a leap for the

wild animal's back, landing squarely and placing his arms at once around Tom's neck.

For a brief instant Tom slackened his speed. With his arms still around the horse's neck, Larry attempted to throw his feet to the ground.

At that instant a terrible explosion sounded through the air. Bushes, trees and portions of rock flew in all directions, and the team and the carriage were hurled in the very midst of the wreckage.

CHAPTER XII

A LUCKY ESCAPE

To the man with the danger flag it looked as if the two in the carriage would certainly be annihilated.

Rocks, bushes, and limbs of trees filled the air, and in the midst of them the vehicle was raised up and dashed over on its side, one of the horses being instantly killed.

As the carriage went over Larry caught Mrs. Kennington in his arms, and thus prevented her head from receiving a serious blow. The boy himself was flung, directly after this, on his back, and the heavy limb of a tree landed across his legs.

The shock of the explosion nearly deafened Larry, and for the moment after he could not actually tell if he was dead or alive. When he collected his scattered senses he found the man with the red flag and two other workmen bending over him.

"He don't look like he was dead," said one of the trio. "See, he's opening his eyes."

"I'm not dead by a good deal," returned the boy, although somewhat feebly. "But—but is the lady all right?"

"We can't say yet. Here, Mike, take hold of this limb and get it off his legs."

The man took hold of the limb as he spoke, and both Mike and the second workman began to assist him. The limb was rather heavy and they had all they could do to roll it away. Fortunately, the stump of a branch on it had kept it from resting its full weight on Larry's lower members. Had it been otherwise, both of the boy's legs would undoubtedly have been broken.

It was with difficulty that the boy arose slowly to his feet.

"Any bones broken?" questioned the bearer of the flag.

"I guess not," was the slow reply. "But I can tell you I feel mighty queer."

"I don't wonder. Why didn't you stop and turn around when you saw me with the red flag?"

"The horse wouldn't stop. Poor fellow! he looks as if he was dead."

"So he is, but the other is all right."

Larry turned his attention to Mrs. Kennington, who lay with her head resting upon the carriage cushion, which had been thrown out of the vehicle during the crash. The lady's eyes were closed, and her face was as white as a sheet.

"Get some water," he exclaimed to the others. "I want to find out if she has only fainted or if it is worse."

He bent down and placed his ear over her breast.

Her heart still beat, but, oh, so faintly. The water was soon brought, and Larry sprinkled some of it in the lady's face. A faint color began to appear in her cheeks, and presently she gave a long sigh and opened her eyes.

"Where—where—Larry!"

"I'm here, Mrs. Kennington."

"What has happened?"

"The explosion—don't you remember?"

"The explosion? Oh, yes! Wasn't it dreadful? Are you hurt?"

"No, ma'am; that is, not enough to count. But it was a close shave."

"I am thankful you escaped," murmured the lady fervently.

"How do you feel?"

"I—I think I am all right."

"No bones broken?"

"I think not, but the shock was fearful."

"Yes, it was. It was bad enough to kill Tom."

"Poor horse! He paid the penalty of his heedlessness with his life. How is his mate?"

"All right, I fancy. There is one of the workmen with her now."

And Larry pointed to where the man was leading the animal away.

"We have had a narrow escape, indeed!" said Mrs. Kennington with a shudder.

"That's so, mum," said the bearer of the flag. "But I hopes you don't blame me. I ran with me flag as soon as we lit the fuse."

"It's a pity you didn't come out before," returned Mrs. Kennington. "Perhaps Larry could have stopped the horse if he had had a little more time to do it in. However, there is no use of speaking of that now. I—I——"

Mrs. Kennington had attempted to rise, but now sank back on the cushion.

"You had better keep quiet for a while," observed Larry. "You are too weak to move just yet."

"I suppose you are right, Larry. But what is best to do?"

"What do you say if I send one of the men back to the house on horseback with a message? I suppose you don't care to go to Carwell now."

"No; I will give up going to Carwell to-day. You may send the man if you wish. Tell Murphy to borrow the Van Dyne carriage to bring me home in."

Larry called one of the workmen, and the fellow willingly set off on the errand. He said he knew Mrs. Kennington's residence well, and was also acquainted with the man-of-all-work. While he was gone the other men removed the dead horse to the side of the road and also dragged the wrecked carriage out of the way. In the meantime Larry placed the cushion in a shady spot under a tree some distance from the scene of the ex-

plosion, and assisted Mrs. Kennington to this more comfortable resting place.

By the time this was done half a dozen men and boys had congregated, attracted by the loud blast. They were greatly interested in what had occurred and they spread the news like wildfire throughout the neighborhood.

When Murphy arrived with the neighbor's carriage he was followed by fully a dozen men, women, and children. Those who knew Mrs. Kennington were much pleased to learn that she had escaped such a great peril.

"Sure, an' it's the wondher yez didn't both git kilt!" exclaimed Murphy, with a broad smile on his honest face. "'Tis good luck yez deserve and have, Mrs. Kennington."

"It was the kind hand of Providence," returned the lady.

Larry and the Irishman assisted her into the carriage the latter had brought.

"Will you go with me, Larry?"

"I was thinking that I might go on to Carwell," replied the boy. "I suppose you wish to send a message to your friend, do you not?"

"I had forgotten about the trip. Yes, I would like to send a message."

"Then, I'll take it. I might as well go to Carwell as any place. I might discover a clew there," he added, with a faint smile.

"Perhaps, but it's not likely. Carwell is an out-of-the-way place, and but for the car shops there it would not amount to anything. Do you feel strong enough to go on? Perhaps you had better return to the house and rest."

"Oh, I am used to being shaken up!" laughed the boy. "I've had worse troubles than this during my life. Why I once went down two flights of stairs in a tenement house in New York, and never so much as sprained a joint."

"Your cheek is bleeding."

"It's only a scratch. No; I'll go to Carwell, unless you want me to stay here with the wreck."

"No, no; that will be all right."

Mrs. Kennington gave him the name and address of her friend, and asked him to explain matters to her, and this he readily promised to do.

Five minutes later Larry was on the way. He met a farmer going in the same direction, and this individual readily allowed him to ride along on the empty hay rigging he was driving.

The farmer stopped on the outskirts of Carwell, and Larry consequently entered the small town on foot. He found the place quite lively, but soon discovered that this was due to a strike which was in progress at the car shops. The streets were filled with sullen-looking men and half-grown boys, some of whom eyed Larry suspiciously as he passed them.

Presently Larry found himself on a corner Mrs. Kennington had described to him. The house he was to call at was close at hand, but its precise location was at that instant a matter of conjecture.

As Larry paused on the board walk and gazed around, two boys and a rough-looking man stepped up to him.

"Wot yer lookin' fer?" demanded the larger of the boys, a fellow about Larry's size.

His insolent manner nettled Larry.

"What business is that of yours?" he returned sharply.

"I'm on guard here; see?"

"On guard—what for?"

"To keep such chaps as you out."

"Out of town?"

"Dat's it."

"But I reckon I have a perfect right to come into town."

"Dat's where you are off, young feller. We're on a strike, an' we ain't goin' ter let no outsiders slip in ter take our places; see?"

CHAPTER XIII

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING

LARRY at once saw through the mystery of the other boy's actions. The fellow was one of the strikers, and he took all strangers to be outsiders looking for chances to fill the vacated places in the car shops.

"So you suppose I came here looking for work?" he said with an odd smile showing on his face.

"Yer did," returned the shop boy quickly.

"You are quite mistaken; I came on private business."

"That's an old yarn," put in the man. "A fellow told me that story not an hour ago, and then went to the office for a job."

"Well, I don't care what he did," replied Larry. "I don't want to cut any one out of his situation."

"Then the best thing you can do is to get out of town," went on the man.

"Dat's it," put in the smaller boy, and the big boy nodded approvingly.

"I will not leave town until I've transacted my business here," returned Larry firmly.

He would have said much more, but he saw that a

crowd was collecting, and that he would stand slim chances against a dozen boys and men, many of whom were armed with clubs.

"You'll get out of town if we say so!" put in another man with a large and very much inflamed nose. "We won't have any scabs here."

"I am not a scab," said Larry, understanding by the term that the man meant one who did not belong to their labor organization. "And I am not here looking for work."

"You are!" howled the big boy who had first addressed him. "Now leave, and be quick, too!"

As he spoke he caught Larry by the shoulder with his left hand and brandished a club with his right.

Larry looked at him squarely, and his face grew pale and stern.

"Take that hand off my arm," he said, in a constrained voice.

"You'll git out of town; see?" blustered the big boy.

"Take that hand off, I say!" repeated Larry sharply.

His quiet but determined manner made the other drop his hold. It was well that he did so, for had he waited, Larry would have knocked him down, no matter what the consequences.

"Now, we want an account of you, anyway," said one of the men.

"I came here with a message for Mrs. George Hotchkiss," said Larry. "I believe she lives near here."

"Yes; in that yellow house with green blinds, over by the brook," put in another of the men.

"Are you going there right away?" asked another.

"Yes."

"Who sent you?"

"Mrs. Kennington, the lady who lives down by Eagle Lake."

The men and boys began to talk among themselves, and finally the leader of the crowd confronted Larry.

"Well, see here, you can go on to Mrs. Hotchkiss' house and deliver your message. But if we find you trying to get to the car-shop office or tackling any of the bosses on the street, look out, that's all."

And with this warning Larry was allowed to pass on. It did not take the boy long to reach the residence of Mrs. George Hotchkiss. He found the lady anxiously awaiting Mrs. Kennington's arrival. She was much shocked to hear of the accident.

"I will drive over to Eagle Lake at once," she said. "It's too bad! Will you come in and ride back with me?"

"No, thank you; I wish to remain over for a while."

"You will find matters lively here. They are having a strike at the car shops, and there is no telling where the matter will end."

"I've had a bit of warning already," smiled Larry grimly. "They ordered me out of town."

"They order every stranger out, I believe. It is not right, but the men seem determined that no newcomers shall take their places."

"What are they striking for?"

"Against a reduction of wages. They are also bitter against Mr. Oldham, a foreman, who has introduced some new machinery which does away with a dozen men in the cabinet department."

Mrs. Hotchkiss offered Larry some refreshments in the shape of cake and fruit, and soon after the boy left. Once outside of the garden gate he paused, hardly knowing how to proceed. As the town was in such a state of excitement, would it be worth while to make a search for a possible clew to the robbery?

"They look at me as a suspicious character already," he said to himself. "If they find me prowling around, they will feel sure I am here for no good, and they will follow me up and make things warm for me."

Nevertheless, Larry was not much frightened, and he did turn toward the center of the town, but took a different road from that pursued in coming to the Hotchkiss residence.

As he was passing a side street, which also turned into town, he saw a man on horseback coming toward him. Larry stepped to one side, and an instant later the man passed him. The boy could not suppress a cry

of astonishment. The man was the same he had rowed across Eagle Lake on the morning following the robbery.

"Hi! Stop! Stop!" cried Larry, before he could think twice. Had he reflected he would not have uttered the command. The man slackened the speed of his horse and turned in his saddle. Larry ran up to his side.

"What do you want?" began the man, and then, as he recognized Larry, his face changed color.

"I want to have a talk with you."

"I haven't time now."

"You must take time. I want to know why you were in such a hurry to get across the lake that morning."

"I—I—who are you, anyway?"

"I'm Larry Curly, the boy who rowed you across Eagle Lake on one morning——"

"Rowed me across Eagle Lake!" exclaimed the man, in apparent astonishment. "You are mistaken, young man."

"Mistaken? What do you mean?"

"You never rowed me across Eagle Lake."

"Why, certainly I did!" cried Larry indignantly. "It was——"

"I haven't any time to waste on you. I was never rowed across Eagle Lake in my life."

"I can't be mistaken," said Larry, a puzzled look

creeping over his face for an instant. "May I ask your name?"

"It is Luke Boughton. I never saw you before, my boy. You have made a mistake."

"It is no mistake, sir," was Larry's reply. He had been studying the stranger's face closely. "Your make-up is a little different from what it was then, but you are the same man."

"Boy, you are crazy!" cried Luke Boughton—for such really was the man's name. "I have no time to waste on you. Get out of my way."

"Not much," responded Larry firmly, as he planted himself directly in front of the horse. "I want to have a talk with you. I have a good mind to turn you over to the police."

"The police!" roared Luke Boughton. "You must indeed be crazy. What have I done to be handed over to the police?"

"What have you done?" burst out Larry. "Don't you know that on the night before the morning I rowed you across the lake Mrs. Noxwell's house was robbed?"

"And do you intimate that I was the thief?" yelled Luke Boughton, his face darkening.

"Yes, I do," returned the boy bluntly. "And I want you to come to the police station and clear yourself."

He had hardly uttered the words when Luke Boughton

ton bent forward. In his hand he held a stout riding whip, and with the butt of it he struck Larry a cruel blow on the head.

Larry staggered to one side, and then sank down on the grassy bank.

He heard Boughton utter something in a triumphant undertone and then horse and rider passed on.

As soon as he could the boy sprang to his feet again. There was a large lump on his forehead, left by the whip, but to this he paid no heed.

He gazed down the road. Luke Boughton was just passing out of sight around a street corner in Carwell.

"I am on the right track," said Larry to himself. "Let me catch that scoundrel and I will have at least one of the men who robbed Mrs. Noxwell's mansion."

CHAPTER XIV

LARRY'S HARD LUCK

A MAN who was not far up the road had seen Boughton's attack upon Larry, and now this individual came running up, asking what was the trouble.

"That man on the horse is, to the best of my belief, a thief," explained the boy. "I wanted him to go to the police station with me and stand examination, and——"

"He knocked you down, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, that looks as if he was afraid to go. How's your head?"

"Feels rather thick, but that doesn't matter. I must catch that man."

"What makes you so anxious about the matter? Did he steal the stuff from you?"

"No, but I was arrested for the theft, and I want to clear myself."

"Are you out on bail?"

"Yes."

"Well, come on, perhaps I can help you catch the thief. Who did he rob?"

"Mrs. Amanda Noxwell."

"What? Well, see here, I'm sorry for you, but I'll be blamed if I'll do anything to help that woman. She's too mean altogether to have even my sympathy. You'll have to go it alone."

And without another word the man turned on his heel and walked away.

"Well, I can't say that I blame him much," thought Larry, as he hurried off in the direction Luke Boughton had pursued. "I suppose she has made him mad clear to the toes, just the same as she has me."

It was not long before Larry stood on the corner, around which Boughton had disappeared. He gave a long and searching look down the street and on both sides. Horse and rider were not in sight.

"Missed him!" groaned Larry. "And now he'll get out of Carwell just as fast as he can."

"See here, didn't we tell you to quit this place?" put in a voice at Larry's elbow, and he found himself confronted by the big boy who had tackled him on his first appearance in the place.

"Oh, give me a rest!" returned the boy impatiently. "I've got nothing to do with your shop or your strike, and I'm not looking for a job here. I'm after a man who was on horseback and rode through as fast as he could. Did you notice where he went?"

"Of course. He turned down the Spurnham road."

"Which is that?"

"Do you see that big oak over there?"

"Yes."

"Well, the Spurnham road is behind that, to the left."

"How far is it to Spurnham?"

"A mile and a half."

"Thanks."

Larry was off like a shot, leaving the big boy standing in the road, his mouth wide open in wonder.

Larry was a good runner, and the oak tree mentioned was soon reached. A winding road led past it, and along this he sped, keeping a keen eye ahead for some sign of the man he was after.

Bushes and trees grew on either side of this new highway, and it was not long before Larry came in sight of a tumbled-down shanty, where an old colored woman was sitting in the open doorway, smoking a clay pipe.

"Good-afternoon, aunty," said Larry. "Did you see anything of a man on horseback along here?"

"Yes, sah, jess went by," was the reply.

"Riding fast?"

"Tol'able fast, sah."

"All right. Thanks," and once more Larry was on the run.

Fully half a mile was covered and still he had not come in sight of Luke Boughton. Then another shanty

appeared in view, in front of which three half-grown white children were playing.

"Did any of you see a man on a horse go by?" was Larry's immediate question, without hardly stopping for a reply.

All the children shook their heads.

"You are sure?"

"Nobody went by for an hour," said the oldest of the children, a bright-eyed girl.

"You are sure of that?"

"Oh, yes, sir, I've been here by the fence all the while."

Larry stood still now and a woman came to the door.

"What does he want of you, Jennie?" she asked of the girl.

"Wants to know if a man went by on a horse."

"No; nobody has gone by since Rogers passed with his milk wagon a couple of hours ago."

"That's queer. The colored woman told me he passed her house."

"Then he must have turned off before he got here."

Larry's face fell a bit.

"Could he do that?"

"Oh, yes, there are several roads running down to the river just a way back."

"How far is the river from the road?"

"Oh, not far."

"Quarter of a mile?"

"Not as far as that."

Larry thanked the woman and gave a smile to the children and began to retrace his steps.

It was not long before he came to a narrow road, somewhat screened by overhanging bushes. It led in the direction of the river, which he could hear pouring over the rocks from beyond, and in the soft dirt Larry could distinguish fresh hoof-prints.

"He must have taken this path," thought the boy. "Now, the question is, what brought him to such an out-of-the-way spot, and will it be safe for me to follow into the brush?"

The boy hesitated only an instant. Then he pulled aside the overhanging bushes and proceeded along the somewhat darkened pathway.

The roaring of the river, which at this point tumbled over innumerable jagged rocks, was now plainly to be heard, and it was not long before he caught an occasional gleam of sparkling water among the breaks in the brush ahead.

Larry proceeded with caution, and when a slight cracking sound ahead reached his ears he came to a halt instantly.

"I wonder what that was?" he thought.

"Whoa, there, Frank!" he heard, in Luke Boughton's voice. "Whoa, old boy, you are all right here, but I'll tie you up and make sure."

Larry instantly dropped out of sight behind a clump of bushes. He heard Boughton continue to speak to the horse and a moment later walk away toward the river.

Making sure that he was not being observed, Larry followed the man almost to the river bank. Here stood an old sawmill now dilapidated by age. All the doors to the place were wide open, and the windows were broken out. The mill-race, also, had all but gone to pieces.

"This is lonely enough for almost anything," said Larry to himself, with something like a shiver. "What in the wide world brought that man here? I declare, the mystery is growing deeper."

Larry waited behind a rock until Luke Boughton had passed inside the old mill. Through the open doors he saw the man ascend the stairs leading to an upper floor.

Should he follow? Larry well knew the risk he was running. His recent encounter on the road had convinced him that Luke Boughton was no mild-tempered man.

But once more the boy's natural daring urged him forward, and like a cat he prowled on until the wide-open doors were reached. Then suddenly he passed inside.

Hardly had he crossed the threshold when a man's footsteps sounded outside. Larry's heart seemed to

jump into his throat, but he did not lose his presence of mind.

He cast a hurried glance around for some place where he might hide. The old mill had been well ransacked when it had been abandoned, but on the floor, in one corner, still rested a pile of half-rotted boards and beams.

Like a flash Larry crossed the floor and dodged behind the pile. He made not the slightest sound, and, as the eyes of the newcomer were not yet used to the gloom, he was not observed.

"Hullo, Boughton!" cried the man at the doorway.

"Hullo!" came from the upper floor. "Did you just get here?"

"Yes. Where are you, upstairs?"

"Yes. Come on up."

"All right, just as soon as I've tied my horse."

Larry listened to this conversation with breathless interest. The voice of the newcomer sounded familiar, and now he was able to place the man. It was the fellow Gregory Kennington had had the trouble with in the old cottage on Eagle Lake—Pete Lomax!

CHAPTER XV

LARRY DEFENDS HIMSELF

LARRY was greatly surprised to learn that the new-comer was Pete Lomax, and for the moment he came near to exposing himself in his endeavor to catch sight of the man, and thus make certain that he was not mistaken.

“Those two men are in league with each other,” he thought. “Can it be possible that Gregory Kennington is also in with both of them?”

Larry heard Pete Lomax leave the old mill and walk some distance away through the bushes, evidently to where he had left his horse standing. In a few minutes the man was back again.

He ascended the somewhat broken stairs with caution, each step creaking beneath his heavy weight. The boy breathed freer when he had disappeared.

What was to be done next? This was the absorbing thought which filled Larry’s mind. Would it be prudent to crawl up the stairs and attempt to listen to what the two might have to say?

He heard the murmur of voices, now in rather a high

key and then again pitched almost in a whisper, and the tramp of feet as either Boughton or Lomax paced nervously about.

At last, overcome by his desire to learn what was being said, Larry left his hiding place and as cautiously as a cat climbed the dilapidated stairs.

When his head was on a level with the top he paused and gazed swiftly about.

Through an open doorway he beheld Boughton and Lomax in a small room overlooking the river. Boughton was walking around, while his companion was in his favorite attitude on a box, smoking his ever-present short pipe.

"I tell you, Pete, you must be mistaken," insisted Boughton. "Say, do you know if it hadn't been for my nerve I would have been knocked clean in a heap!"

"Oh, you've got nerve enough," laughed Lomax. "But to meet him—and way out here—it's too much."

And the man on the box shook his head.

"Nevertheless, it's so, Pete."

"What is he doing here?"

"He has a boat on Eagle Lake, and I've heard that he catches fish for a living."

"Is that so?" burst out Lomax, jumping to his feet. "Why—why——"

"What? Have you met him?"

"I believe I have. But I wouldn't know him."

"Well, that's not to be wondered at."

"I reckon that's so, too, but still——" Lomax broke off short. "What is to do now?"

"Oh, we'll let matters rest until this other affair blows over."

"But you can't do that."

"Why not?"

"The boy is under arrest for the robbery."

"What?" Boughton stared at his companion for a second in amazement, and then burst into a fit of laughing. "Well, if this isn't rich!"

Lomax joined in the laugh and refilled his pipe.

"So you see it mixes matters," he observed.

"But the boy is out, Pete."

"Then he has secured bail. You see, they think he and the man he lives with, Howard Bruin, committed the robbery. Bruin has disappeared, and they don't know where to find him."

"And that makes it look black for him, eh?" chuckled Luke Boughton.

"Of course. Besides, Mrs. Noxwell is certain he is guilty."

"So much the better for us. By the way, what of young Kennington?"

"I tried to see him," said Lomax slowly. "But I couldn't make it."

"Wasn't he at home?"

"If he was he wouldn't show himself. Do you know, I'm getting a little afraid of him. I reckon Mrs. Kennington's influence is beginning to tell on him."

"Bosh and rot!" grumbled Luke Boughton. "We'll get him over that mighty quick."

"He won't do anything I want him to, I can tell you that. If I had my way—Jumping Junebugs! What's that?"

Pete Lomax gave a prolonged howl and jumped up from his seat.

"Wasps!" cried Boughton. "By Jove! there's a whole swarm of them! We must get out of here! Get away! shoo!"

"The smoking brought 'em out!" muttered Lomax, as he struck out right and left. "Get away! shoo! Oh, my nose! Where's the ladder?"

Both men made a blind rush for the open doorway, the swarm of wasps following.

Before Larry could retreat down the ladder the two men were on top of him. At first in their excitement they did not notice who he was, but when all landed on the lower floor in a heap, Lomax gasped out:

"What! Luke, here's the boy!"

"So it is! Say, where did you—I see, you followed me!"

Larry tried to get away. He was on his back, knocked over by the weight of Lomax's body, but he quickly scrambled up.

Yet ere he had taken two steps, Boughton had him by the arm.

"You've been spying on us!" he said hoarsely. "Don't attempt to deny it!"

"There is no call to do so," replied Larry, as calmly as he could.

The wasps had not followed the men below, so they were free to turn their entire attention to Larry.

"Did you follow me on horseback from Carwell?" went on Boughton.

"No."

"Then you must be a good runner."

"I am."

"And what have you heard?" put in Lomax.

"I've heard enough to know that you——" Larry checked himself.

"What?" demanded Boughton.

"Never mind now."

"I demand to know how much you heard of our conversation."

"And I refuse to answer, so there!" retorted Larry boldly. "You can't drive me."

"We'll see about that, my boy," said Boughton significantly.

Then he turned to Lomax.

"Pete, see if you can't shut those outer doors."

"What do you intend to do?" cried Larry. "Make me a prisoner?"

"That's about it," grimly returned Luke Boughton. "We'll see if we can't teach you to be civil."

"You will gain nothing by such a course."

"We'll see about that. How about the doors, Pete?"

"I reckon I can fix 'em," muttered the man with the short pipe. "They ain't been shut in so long they work rather hard. There!"

The doors came together with a bang, and Lomax shot the big wooden bolt into place.

"Now he won't be able to slip out all in a second," said Lomax. "You can let up your grip on him."

"If you try to run, it will be the worse for you!" warned Boughton, as he released his hold on Larry's arm. "I am not a man to be trifled with, as you will learn before long. You made the worst move of your life when you followed me here."

To this Larry made no reply. He was trying to devise the best plan of procedure under the sudden change of circumstances. It was plain to see that the men in whose power he was were lawless fellows, and there was no telling how far they would proceed if he made a move to thwart their evil designs.

"Do you want to bind him up?" questioned Lomax. "Or are you going to take him along when you go?"

"We'll see about that later," responded his companion slowly. "I allow as this is quite a surprise to us, but we'll get over it, never fear."

"Do you mean to tell me you intend to make me a prisoner?" asked Larry, a peculiar look coming into his eyes, a look, however, which the person he addressed failed to catch.

"That's about the size of it."

"Maybe you are mistaken," went on the boy slowly.

"What do you mean?" cried Lomax and Boughton in a breath, growing suspicious at once.

"I don't think it can be done, that's all."

"Do you mean you will try to escape?" asked Boughton, in an ugly manner.

"Never mind what I mean. If you wish to know more just look out in the opening in front of the mill."

Not suspecting any trick, Lomax and Boughton rushed to the door, threw it partly open and peered out. They saw nothing unusual.

"What are you giving us?" began Boughton, turning back. "Do you—Hullo! stop, you rascal!"

Larry had retreated to the rear of the mill and was now climbing up on a shelf under a small window overlooking the water. Boughton made a leap for him, but was too late.

Crash! The boy's body passed through the somewhat broken sash frame, and a moment later disappeared with a splash into the swiftly flowing river.

CHAPTER XVI

INTO THE RIVER

"By Jove! He's a goner!" shouted Boughton, as he drew himself up to the small window and gazed out.

"Can you see him?" questioned Pete Lomax.

"No, he's gone under. Say, that was a daring jump, eh?"

"Oh, he's a plucky boy and no mistake. Come on outside and see if we can't stop him."

Lomax flung open the big doors and dashed out with Boughton at his heels. They passed around one corner of the old mill, and a moment later stood on a projecting rock a few yards below.

In the meantime Larry had struck the water head first, and gone under for a short distance.

Fortunately the stream at this point was quite deep, so the impetus of the dive did not bring him up against any obstruction with violence. By the time his hands touched bottom, the force of the movement was spent, and he at once began to rise to the surface.

While he was doing this he bethought himself to put as much distance as possible between himself and the

mill, and he accordingly struck out with all the strength at his command for the opposite shore.

When his head did finally appear above the surface he was all of forty feet from the mill. The current, however, had carried him directly in front of the rock upon which Lomax and Boughton were standing, on the watch for him.

"There he is!" cried Boughton, as Larry's head met his view. "Come back here, boy!"

"Yes, come back here, or it will be the worse for you!" added Pete Lomax.

To these commands Larry paid no attention. His eyes were fastened on the opposite shore, and he was wondering if he could reach it before the current should carry him on to the dangerous rapids below.

"Are you coming back?" demanded Boughton, after a second of silence.

Again Larry vouchsafed no reply, and the man began to grow ugly.

"If you don't turn around I'll shoot you!"

"No, don't do anything of that kind!" whispered Pete Lomax, in evident alarm.

"It's only a bluff to scare him," returned his companion. "We must make him come back. If he gets away he may make us no end of trouble."

"Oh, all right, then."

Lomax raised his voice to a shout.

"You don't want to be shot, do you? Come back, then, do you hear?"

Larry did hear, but instead of obeying or replying, he very promptly dove out of sight.

When the boy came up, the baffled men saw that he had gained another ten yards, and was now well out toward mid-stream.

"This will never do!" cried Boughton. "He'll get away as sure as fate."

"He will unless he is caught in the rapids," returned Lomax. "My, how the water roars!"

"Oh, it's dangerous crossing here, there's no doubt of that. But we must go after him, anyway."

"Fire a shot to scare him."

This was done, and Larry promptly disappeared again. This time, on coming up, he was past the middle of the stream, and they saw that in some manner he had gotten rid of his coat and vest. As a matter of fact, the boy had also kicked off his shoes, realizing that it was to be a hard struggle to get away. A rock was close at hand, and this partly sheltered him from view.

"Ain't there a boat around here?" demanded Boughton anxiously.

"There is an old boat up the stream, but it may not be good enough to use."

"Run for it!"

Lomax started in the direction where the craft he had mentioned was tied up among the bushes. It was



“Stop where you are!” — *Page 137.*

a well worn, flat-bottom affair and looked rather shaky. On the seats rested a pair of worm-eaten oars.

"Shove her out! She's good enough for our use!" cried Boughton. "Quick, now, for the young rascal is getting ready to leave the rock."

The flat-bottom boat was shoved from the mud bank upon which it rested and both Boughton and Lomax jumped in. Lomax took the oars, while his companion seized an old tin can and began to bail out the water which came in through several cracks.

"She won't leak after the cracks swell shut," said Boughton. "Pull, Pete, or we will be too late!"

Lomax bent to the oars with a will, and soon the old boat was making rapid progress toward the rock in the stream upon which Larry had sought temporary refuge.

The boy saw them coming and his heart sank for the moment. He was almost too exhausted to attempt to gain the shore.

Suddenly an idea came into his mind and he resolved to act on it without delay. On the top of the big rock rested several smaller ones, and one of these was loose.

Picking up the rock he poised it over his head and sang out:

"Stop where you are! If you come any closer I'll throw this at you!"

Boughton heard his cry, and looked forward. Then he gave a coarse laugh.

"You can't bluff us that way, boy," he sang out. "Put down that rock. If you'll give in we'll treat you easy-like."

"I want you to keep off!"

The boat was now within five yards of Larry's foot-hold. A few more strokes and the bow of the boat would be at his feet.

Taking careful aim, the boy launched the stone forth into the air.

Boughton saw it coming and yelled to Lomax to dodge, a thing the fellow did so hastily that one of his oars slipped from his grasp and floated away.

The stone fell with a crash into the bottom of the boat. It struck a plank that was half rotted with age, and stove a hole clean through it. The water began to pour in by the bucketful, and almost before they realized it, both of the men were up to their ankles in the element.

"Confound the boy!" roared Boughton, as he sprang up, followed by Lomax. "The boat is sinking. We'll go to the bottom, sure!"

"We'll have to swim for it," muttered Lomax sullenly. "Let's strike out for the rock."

He made a leap forward, and Boughton quickly followed. They landed within a couple of yards of the resting place, and a few strokes brought them to it.

In the meantime Larry was not idle. As soon as he saw that the boat was foundering, and that his enemies

were after him, he sprang from the rock and began to swim for the shore. The brief rest had somewhat refreshed him, and he made good progress.

"He has gone!" he heard Lomax exclaim, on climbing on the rock the boy had left. "He's going to make the shore, sure."

"After him!" yelled Boughton, and both dove from the rock in the direction Larry had taken.

The current on this side of the stream was much stronger than on the other, and Larry was floated all of a hundred feet toward the rapids before he was able to grasp an overhanging tree and pull himself to land.

He gazed backward for one brief instant, saw that the two men were in close pursuit, and then disappeared in the bushes.

"Gone!" burst from Luke Boughton's lips. "Too bad! He may cause us a lot of trouble."

"He won't if we face it out," returned Lomax. "What is the word of a young tramp against a gentleman like you?"

"That's all right—how about you?" snarled Boughton, as he ran up the bank.

"I'll disappear, as usual," laughed Lomax. "I ain't ready for more work yet, anyway."

"Pooh!" snorted Boughton; but for the while he said no more.

They heard Larry crashing through the bushes ahead, and then all became quiet.

"We must get out of here and get back to the mill," said Lomax, after a moment of thought. "He may get some sort of help and come down on us."

"We had better leave the mill."

"Of course, but you must remember the bag of stuff I brought there that night——"

"By Jove, that's so! We must get that out of the way by all means. How are we to get across the river?"

"I know where there is a boat on this side. Come on, every minute is precious."

The two passed along the river bank for probably two hundred feet. Here they came to a little inlet, where, locked to a stake, rested a fine round-bottom craft, long and narrow.

"Jump in!" whispered Lomax, wrenching off the staple which held the lock. "There may be somebody near here, and we don't want to be seen."

"But the oars——"

"Here is a bit of board, and I'll paddle with that. Now we are off."

A moment later the round-bottom boat was making fair headway in the direction of the old mill.

CHAPTER XVII

HOT WORDS

LARRY passed into the brush for a distance of about a hundred feet. Then he crouched and waited, and it was not long before he heard Lomax and Boughton pass up the river bank.

He paused until he was sure they had abandoned the chase, and then, with extreme caution, he retraced his steps until through a thin mass of leaves he was able to watch the river front and the water beyond.

"Where could they have gone?" was the question which arose in his mind, but it had hardly been formulated when the round-bottom boat came into view, with Lomax paddling it with a bit of board.

Larry could hardly repress a cry of surprise. It was plain that the two had become alarmed, and were on their way back to the rendezvous.

"They realize that it won't do to come out here," said the boy to himself. "I must get help and have them held. Most likely they have something at the mill they wish to get away with. Now, what's to be done?"

This was a question easier to ask than to answer.

Larry was in a dense woods which led he knew not where. The villages of Carwell and Spurnham were on the other side of the river, and there was no telling how far it was to any dwelling place.

"I don't feel like swimming that river again," he thought. "My! but my arms ache yet from those strokes. I'll walk up the bank until I strike something."

By the time he had reached this conclusion he saw that the boat was more than three-quarters of the way across. Lomax handled the paddle as if it were no new thing. Boughton sat in the bow, gazing alternately ahead and behind.

Making sure that he was not seen by his late pursuers, Larry was making his way along the slippery and somewhat irregular bank, when presently the bark of a dog reached his ears. It was an angry bark, and though it sounded some distance off, it made the boy jump.

"If a dog comes after me I'll have to shin up a tree," he soliloquized. "I've had enough of them when on the tramp. I wonder if he has nosed me out?"

This appeared to be the case, but, although he waited for fully three minutes, the barks came no nearer, but sounded exactly from the same spot as before.

"By jinks! I'll bet he's tied up!" suddenly cried Larry to himself. "And if that is so, there must be a

house in the neighborhood. What a fool I've been to waste precious time waiting here!"

He hesitated no longer, but went tearing through the brush as fast as the thickets would permit.

Five minutes later he emerged into a small clearing, inclosed by a stout wire fence. Beyond was a neat cottage, and a barn and several outhouses. There was also a big dog kennel, in front of which stood a rather savage-looking dog, barking vigorously.

A man was at work near the barn, and making sure that the dog was indeed chained fast, Larry crawled between the wires of the fence and made his way toward the man.

The farmer—for such Isaac Grise was—looked at Larry in surprise.

"What do you want?" he asked, as he rested on the handle of the hoe he had been using.

"Say, that dog can't get loose, can he?"

"Not unless I unchain him."

"All right, then. Now, I would like to get help."

"Ain't got nothin' fer ye," returned the farmer shortly. "Maybe I'd better unchain Towser, after all."

"No! no!—you misunderstand me!" cried the boy quickly. "I want help to capture a couple of robbers."

At these words Isaac Grise's eyes opened to their fullest extent.

"A couple of robbers?" he gasped.

"That's what I said, sir—the men who robbed Mrs. Noxwell's mansion."

"I heard tell o' that robbery," was the farmer's slow reply. "So you want to catch the fellers that did it? Do you know where they be?"

"Yes; across the river at the old mill."

"Dutch Henry's mill?"

"I don't know whose mill it is. It's in that direction." And Larry pointed with his finger.

"That's Dutch Henry's place. You see, Dutch Henry sot up that mill about twenty-five year ago. He thought he would make a big thing of it, but when the freshet——"

"Excuse me," interrupted Larry impatiently. "But those men are trying to get away, and there is consequently not a moment to lose."

"I see, I see! Two robbers! Have they got what they stole with 'em?"

"That I can't say, but it's likely."

"Good enough. And I reckon there's a big reward for 'em. Ain't there?"

"There ought to be," went on Larry, still more impatiently. "Will you come along and try to capture them?"

"Certainly! Certainly! Two, did you say?"

"Yes."

"Then we had better take Sam Nelson along. Sam's got a farm tudder side of this clearing. He's a power-

ful feller, Sam is, and can give the biggest man in the county the grape-vine twist and floor him."

"All right; we'll take Mr. Nelson along by all means. How can we get across the river?"

"Sam's got a boat. That's partly why I spoke of him. I never kept a boat, 'cose I hain't got no use for it. When Bill—that's my brother—was alive he kept a boat, but it dried out and fell to pieces, so I—but you're in a hurry, an' quite naterally so. Come on."

Isaac Grise threw down his hoe and led the way across the field, and Larry followed close behind.

A dense bit of brush was passed, and they came to another clearing, fully twice as large as the one just left. Nelson, the neighbor, was found at home, and after he was introduced Larry quickly made him acquainted with such particulars as he thought necessary.

"I'll go," said Sam Nelson quietly. "Wouldn't want any better fun. Perhaps I had better take my shot-gun, eh?"

"Yes," said Larry, thinking of the pistol-shot on the river, but sincerely trusting that there would be no bloodshed.

"See here! I don't want no shooting," said Isaac Grise. "I'm a peaceable citizen, I am, and I——"

"That's all right, Ike," laughed Nelson. "Come on. As the boy says, there's no time to waste in talk."

He and Larry led the way, Isaac Grise following somewhat slowly.

There was a well-defined path from the Nelson farm to the river, so it took but a few minutes to reach the water's edge.

Hardly had the river appeared in sight than Sam Nelson uttered an exclamation of anger.

"The scoundrels!"

"What's the matter—have you discovered anything?" asked Larry anxiously.

"Didn't you say they took a boat from over here?"

"Yes."

"A long, narrow affair, painted white and green?"

"Yes."

"It was my boat. See, they broke off the lock from this post. But I don't see how they got along without these oars," went on Nelson, indicating the blades he carried on his shoulder.

"They paddled the boat with a bit of board," cried Larry. "That Lomax seemed to be quite skillful at it."

"Well, just wait until I get in his wool!" exclaimed Sam Nelson wrathfully. "This proves he's a thief beyond a doubt. I'll break every bone in his body."

Larry could not help gazing on the tall and muscular fellow, and he had no doubt that if the farmer and Lomax came into a personal encounter, Nelson would be able to keep his word.

"What's to do now?" asked Isaac Grise nervously. "We can't cross on nothin'," and he appeared to be re-

lieved that no mode of transportation was at hand. Evidently his sudden enthusiasm to catch the robbers had cooled to some extent.

"We'll find another boat," said Sam Nelson determinedly.

"That's the talk!" cried Larry. "We'll get over by hook or crook."

"Right you are; come on!" and off Sam Nelson started, Larry by his side and Isaac Grise following, more slowly than ever.

CHAPTER XVIII

A TOTAL DISAPPEARANCE

LARRY could easily see that the big farmer, Sam Nelson, was much agitated over the loss of his beautiful round-bottom boat and that he meant to make it go hard with Lomax and Boughton should he be able to catch the unworthy pair.

Nelson led the way along the shore of the roaring river until the party of three arrived at a small brook, which flowed from the mountains of the northwest. Then he passed up the course of this tiny stream for probably fifty feet.

"Here we are," he said, pointing to a small rowboat which lay in the mud of the sloping bank. "I thought John Gregg's craft would be here. It's lucky we've got them oars, for there ain't none here. Catch hold, both of you."

Larry caught hold as asked, and Isaac Grise did the same. In a moment more the boat was afloat, and then the three piled in.

"I'll take the oars," said Nelson. "I reckon I can row better than you, Ike, or the boy. Steady now."

Sam Nelson gave a few sweeping strokes, which

proved that he was familiar with the handling of a boat. The craft shot into the main stream, and the journey to the old mill was begun.

It was no easy matter to keep the boat from turning down towards the rapids, but Sam Nelson's stroke was strong when he once settled to work, and he managed to steer a fairly straight course.

When they landed on a soft spot just below the mill Larry calculated that half an hour must have elapsed since he had seen Lomax and Boughton crossing, and had gone for assistance.

"They have had plenty of time in which to clear out," he thought somewhat bitterly. "It is more than likely that we won't catch so much as a glimpse of them."

"There's my boat," observed Sam Nelson, as he pointed still farther down the river. "That's safe, thank goodness. Now come on and point out the rascals."

Larry sprang to the front and started for the old mill on a run. Nelson followed swiftly, leaving Isaac Grise to bring up the rear on a walk.

The lower doors of the old structure were wide open, and a peep within told that that portion, at least, of the place was deserted. Then Larry ran up the stairs and looked around.

Only a few angry wasps, the remnant of those that had been disturbed, buzzed around. Otherwise, all was

silent, and a look through the various apartments under the roof showed that Lomax and Boughton had indeed sought safety in flight.

"See anybody?" called up Sam Nelson.

"No; they're gone," returned Larry. "Better look in the bushes——"

Larry stopped short as a small bit of paper fluttered past him. It had been lying on a box, and the breeze from the open window had caught it up and deposited it close at hand.

He picked it up, and as it was growing somewhat dark, he stepped to the window with it.

The piece of paper proved to be the part of an envelope, and it was addressed to Gregory Kennington!

The envelope had no postmark, showing that it had been delivered privately.

Larry opened the portion and found a small corner of a letter within. It bore these words:

—"lots of work—don't fail us—silver—some papers——"
PETE."

For the time Larry became so interested in this bit of paper that he forgot about the two men below, and was only brought to the realization of what was on hand by Sam Nelson calling up to him:

"Come down! Ike heard them out in the bushes!"

Jamming the bit of paper in his pocket, Larry leaped

down the stairs three steps at a time. Nelson had already gone outside, and was making his way across the clearing in front of the mill.

"Ike heard a horse crashing through the brush!" shouted Nelson. "It must be one or the other of 'em."

"Yes; they were on horseback," replied Larry. "Come, I will show you where Boughton left his horse."

The place was soon reached. As Larry stepped up to the tree, which showed signs of the horse's droppings, a crashing was heard not a hundred feet away in the direction of the Spurnham road.

As we know, the boy was a swift runner, and now he forged ahead at a speed which soon took him out of sight of the two men behind.

He still heard the hoofs of the horse, as the animal went plunging through the undergrowth of the neglected path.

At last the main road was reached at the very point where Larry had left it to take his way to the mill.

It was now growing dark rapidly, the sun having set while the party of three were crossing the river.

In the twilight Larry looked up and down the Spurnham road eagerly. He was doomed to bitter disappointment. Neither of the robbers was in sight.

He listened intently, and around a bend, some distance away, he fancied he detected the steady hoof strokes of two horses.

"What do you intend to do now?" questioned the big farmer.

"That's the road to Spurnham, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll follow them on foot. It isn't likely that they will go very far during the night."

"In that case we'll go back," put in Isaac Grise, who had just come up. "I don't want to go from home any farther, seeing how I left the old woman alone."

"I'll have to get back, too," said Nelson. "The night's supply of milk is got to go to the depot before eight o'clock. Sorry I can't help you any more."

"I'm very thankful to you that you did so much," returned Larry.

"Won't you catch cold in your shirt sleeves and barefooted?"

"Oh, I'm used to roughing it, and I'm tough. But I wouldn't mind having a coat and hat for appearance's sake."

"I'll lend you mine," said Grise, who was a small-built man. "You can bring them back on your return."

"Thank you. I won't forget you—nor you," added Larry, turning to Sam Nelson.

The transfer of the coat and hat was soon made, and then Larry, after a few more words with the farmers, who said they would take a look around the old mill on the way back, started on his way to Spurnham.

The road Larry traveled was a lonely one, and long before Spurnham was reached the darkness of the night had settled down.

The boy found the village a bustling one, even more so than Carwell during the strike. There were half a dozen stores and several taverns, and all were well patronized.

A crowd of villagers were attracted by his odd appearance, wet trousers, bare feet, and long coat, and soon a couple of fellows set up a jeer.

"Look at the new arrival, boys!"

"He must have his clothes made in Paris."

"Bare feet must be coming into fashion again."

Larry took this raillery in good part, and when the boys had finished he asked, somewhat quietly:

"Will you tell me the way to the police station?"

"What, want to get yourself locked up?" laughed the older of the boys.

"No, I want to report a robbery, and a couple of robbers."

"Stole your duds, did they?"

"Worse than that. Come, quit fooling, and tell me the way to the station-house."

Seeing that they could not chaff Larry, and that he was in earnest in his request, the boys stopped their fun and directed him to the police station, but a few blocks away.

Ten minutes later Larry was telling his story to the

officer in charge. He gave all the details, only suppressing the name of Gregory Kennington, doing this for the sake of the young man's mother. He was still determined not to expose Gregory until he had positive proof of the young man's guilt.

After Larry's story was told, two policemen were sent out to search for Lomax and Boughton. Larry went with them, and the search was continued until midnight.

It proved fruitless. Nothing was seen nor heard of the two robbers, and it looked doubtful if they had come to Spurnham at all.

When Larry returned to the station-house he was utterly worn out. The officer in charge allowed him to go to sleep on a sofa in a back room, and here the boy slept soundly until morning.

Larry's first resolve on waking was to return to the outskirts of Cleveland and ascertain if anything had been heard of Howard Bruin. The boy was getting worried over his benefactor's strange disappearance. Besides, if the artist had appeared, he wished to tell all he knew concerning the guilty parties.

At a cheap country store the boy purchased a coat, a hat, and a serviceable pair of shoes out of his scant savings. Then he made an arrangement with a farmer to return the borrowed coat and hat to Isaac Grise.

There was a straight road from Spurnham to Cleve-

land, with a side road which led to Howard Bruin's house. This road passed the mansion of Mrs. Kennington, and Larry resolved to stop on the way and learn how the kind lady was feeling after her narrow escape from death.

It was well on towards noon when Larry arrived in the vicinity of the place.

He saw Gregory Kennington standing at the wide-open gates. The young man was dressed in a bicycle suit, and near at hand rested a wheel of the latest pattern.

Gregory caught sight of Larry a second later, and his face took on a dark look.

"What do you want?" he demanded, as the boy came up to the gateway.

"I wish to find out how your mother is."

"She's doing well," was the short answer.

"She got over her shock all right?"

"Didn't I say she was doing well? Would she be if she hadn't gotten over the shock?" sneered Gregory.

"You needn't get so crusty about it!" exclaimed Larry.

"Well, then, don't ask me any questions."

"I wouldn't if you hadn't asked the first one. I'll go in and talk to the housekeeper."

"Well, if that isn't cool! You'll do nothing of the kind. We don't want you around here."

"Who are we?"

"Well, I'm one."

"But isn't your mother up?"

"Never mind if she is."

"I am sure she'll want to see me."

"Rats!" exclaimed the young man, as he began to puff away at an ever-present cigarette. "For a young tramp I think you are getting altogether too large for your clothing."

"Excuse me, but I imagine I about fit my clothing," said Larry dryly. "And I am not a tramp, nor do I associate with tramps, as some do who claim a higher standing in society."

Larry uttered the last words with peculiar emphasis and meaning, and he noted that Gregory Kennington's face changed color perceptibly.

"See here, what do you mean?" blustered the young man.

"I mean just what I say, Gregory Kennington."

"Do you insinuate that I associate with tramps?"

"Tramps, and worse than tramps, if you want the whole truth."

Gregory staggered back against one of the gates and stared at Larry, as if he had not heard aright.

"You—you don't know what you are saying, boy," he faltered.

"I am sorry to say that I know exactly what I'm saying."

"Sorry?" was the puzzled query.

"Yes; sorry for your mother's sake. I'll tell you why," went on Larry, speaking rapidly. "Outside of Mr. Bruin your mother is the only friend I have in the world, and I would almost rather cut off my right hand than to bring to light something which I know will break her heart. Now, you have not treated me right, but I would be willing to let that pass, for I fancy that you are not bad at heart, but have only got into the wrong set. But I can't do anything that would be against the law—and I've got to clear myself, and—and——"

"Stop! Stop!" exclaimed Gregory, with something like terror depicted on his face. He looked back toward the house. "Come with me, and tell me what you mean."

He caught Larry by the arm and almost forced the boy to walk down the road a bit with him.

"Now out with it! Tell me what you have—what you think you know," he went on.

A strange feeling came into Larry's heart, as he faced Gregory Kennington, a feeling the boy could not explain. It was only in after years that he found its solution.

"Look here, Gregory, tell me truthfully, did you—did you have anything to do with it?"

He could not bring himself to utter what was in his heart in plainer words.

A hasty reply arose on the young man's lips. Then, as his eyes met those of the boy before him, he answered slowly:

“No, I did not, Larry.”

CHAPTER XIX

GREGORY MAKES A CONFESSION

EVIDENTLY it was Larry's reference to Mrs. Kennington which had brought Gregory down from his high-spirited manner. It was plain to see that in spite of his willfulness the young man thought a great deal of his mother, and that Larry had touched the right chord when he said that he would do much to shield the lady from pain.

As for the boy himself, he gave a long sigh of relief after Gregory's simple declaration. Evidently the very simplicity of the words had impressed him with their truth.

"You don't know how glad I am to hear you say that!" said Larry warmly. "I trust you will be able to prove your words."

"Don't you believe me?" questioned Gregory quickly.

"I do, yes; but that's not all."

"Look here; tell me what you have discovered, Larry—tell me all!" burst out the young man pleadingly.

"Well, it isn't much, but it is very important—to

me. In the first place, about that handkerchief that was picked up at Mrs. Noxwell's. That belonged to Mr. Howard Bruin, and it appears to me that it was the one he loaned you to wipe your face with the day we were all on the lake."

"The day you knocked me overboard; yes, I know. Go on."

"Then I've discovered that you and a chap called Pete Lomax are rather thick, and that you also know a man named Luke Boughton."

"What of that?"

"Luke Boughton and Pete Lomax were two of the men who robbed Mrs. Noxwell's mansion."

At this Gregory's face grew as pale as death.

"How did you discover that?" he gasped.

"In rather a roundabout way. But that is not all. At a place called Dutch Henry's Mill, to which I tracked Boughton and Lomax, I found part of a letter which had been directed to you."

"A letter? Let me see it!"

Larry brought forth the portion he had found of the epistle and allowed Gregory to examine it.

"I see it all!" groaned the young man, after a deep silence of fully a minute. "It certainly looks black for me, and—and maybe I can't clear myself."

"Can you explain about the handkerchief?"

"I can only say this much; I had the handkerchief when I got to shore, and I meant to return it to Howard

Bruin. After that I thought no more of it until I heard of the handkerchief clew at Mrs. Noxwell's home the day after the robbery."

"Then it must have been taken from you by Pete Lomax."

"Very likely, and if he did take it, he did it for a most foul purpose," replied Gregory Kennington bitterly.

"What do you mean?"

"He took the handkerchief, thinking it was mine, and that he would thus cast suspicion on me."

"He is down on you, then?"

"It is worse than that. To a certain extent, he has me in his pow—— But we won't speak of that. He wants to bring me down to his level."

"How about Luke Boughton?"

"I know very little of that man, excepting that he pretends he was once a friend of my father. He and Lomax are hand and glove in all things."

"Did you know that Boughton and Lomax committed the robbery?"

"No, I did not. I fancied they might have done it, but Mrs. Noxwell says the papers taken were of value only to Howard Bruin, so that put me on the fence."

"I know Lomax was trying to get money out of you," went on Larry after a pause. "I overheard your talk in the old cottage by the lane the afternoon of the storm."

"Were you there?"

"Yes, and I overheard him say that he had a right to get all he could out of you."

"He is a human leech, that man!" burst out Gregory. "He has a hold on me, and he intends to squeeze me all he can in consequence."

"Can't you break that hold?" asked Larry, with a ring of genuine sympathy in his voice. Now that Gregory's manner had taken a different turn he found himself quite drawn to the young man.

"I wish I could. Oh, how I wish I could!" was the positive reply. "Do you know it is this which makes me fairly wild at times. I would be different—at least I would try to be different—if I could get clear of Lomax and his persecutions."

"Then, it's as bad as that?"

"Yes, it is. He possesses a certain secret, and if he exposed me, I would—well, I don't know what would become of me, that's the truth."

"He could ruin your life?"

"It would amount to that."

"And there is no way to get clear of him?"

"No way, excepting to keep on paying him money. I've given him hundreds of dollars—all I could get from mother, with the exception of what I spent on sports—but he wants more and more."

At this last statement Gregory hung his head, and something like a tear glistened in each of his eyes. Im-

pulsively Larry put out his hand and grasped that of the young man.

"See, here, let us be friends!" he exclaimed earnestly. "Let us forget the past and start new. I am only a poor boy, and just now somewhat down on my luck, but I'll help you all I can. We will work together against Lomax and Boughton, and I will bring them to justice without you appearing in the case. Lomax won't be able to harm you when he is behind the bars, will he?"

"He can harm me any time he takes it into his head to open his mouth. That's the worst of it. Of course he would be more revengeful if he thought I had done anything to bring him to jail."

"I see."

"Tell me all you know," went on Gregory curiously.

The two sat down on a large, flat rock, and Larry told his story from beginning to end, even going back to the happenings in his life previous to his arrival in the vicinity of Cleveland.

Gregory Kennington drank in every word with deep interest. At times his face would light up with real admiration for the plucky wanderer, without a home, who had so bravely faced the world and made a place for himself.

"You're a real hero, Larry," he said warmly, at the conclusion. "If I had known you the day I met you

on the lake as I do now, I never would have done what I did."

"Well, that's past now. Shall we be friends?"

"With pleasure."

"Then shake."

And they shook hands.

"No wonder mother went your bail," went on Gregory. "She knew you for your true worth."

"And she is better?"

"Yes, she is quite well."

"Was Mrs. Hotchkiss here?"

"Yes, and mother is going to Carwell to-day to look up those fair matters. Come on up to the house."

"Is your mother alone now?"

"Yes, and she'll be glad to see you, no matter what I said before. Come on, and I'll set myself right before her so far as you are concerned."

The two arose from the rock and turned toward the Kennington mansion.

As they did so, the clatter of a horse's hoofs sounded on the hard road, and a moment later a horseman appeared in sight.

Larry paused to see who it was, and then gave a cry, which was followed by an exclamation from Gregory.

The newcomer was Howard Bruin.

"Mr. Bruin!" cried Larry. "Stop! Stop!"

"What, Larry! is that you?" sang out the artist, as he brought his horse to a halt.

"Yes, sir. Where in the world have you been?"

"I've been to Chicago since I was home. Didn't Maggie get my message?"

"I rather guess not."

"I sent one saying I would not be home until to-day or to-morrow. It's too bad it miscarried. I presume she was worried, and you, too, Larry."

"Then you don't know what has happened since you've been away?"

"Anything of importance?"

"Rather important," returned the boy, coming back to his old dryness of speech. "Mrs. Noxwell's house has been robbed, and she declares that you and I are the culprits. I was arrested, and am now out on bail, and the police are searching everywhere for you."

Howard Bruin stared at Larry in silence for a moment, then he emitted a long, low whistle.

CHAPTER XX

HOWARD BRUIN'S DILEMMA

For several minutes after he had heard what the trouble was, Howard Bruin's face was a study. At first he looked worried, then a half-amused smile crossed his features, and this finally gave way to a stern look, that had little of pleasantness in it.

"So this is Mrs. Noxwell's revenge on me for beating her in that last lawsuit," he said bitterly. "And she feels that I will win this second suit, too. She would have me branded as a robber, and let folks imagine that she cannot go to law successfully now because her papers have been stolen."

"That's the way it looks," returned Larry. "I must say that I never saw a woman that seemed so disagreeable in her ways."

"She was always that way," put in Gregory Kennington. "Because we are neighbors, mother tries to get along with her, but it is hard work, I can tell you."

"Well, I will quickly explode Mrs. Noxwell's theory," cried Howard Bruin. "But, say——"

The artist stopped short, and looked first at Larry and then at Gregory Kennington.

"Oh, we have made up," said Larry, interpreting the look. "I will tell you about it later," he said, in a lower tone, as the young man turned away for an instant. "But what are you going to do now?"

"Go home first, and then go to Cleveland and have a talk with Justice Raum."

"You won't go to see Mrs. Noxwell?"

"Not at first; but I may go and give her a piece of my mind later. She knows better than to accuse me of this robbery. But didn't you say that you were out on bail?"

"I am."

"Who went your bail?"

"Mrs. Kennington."

"Ah! she is a kind woman—always was."

"Excuse me," put in Gregory, rather awkwardly. "But I want to say, Mr. Bruin, that I am sorry we had some trouble in the past, and——"

"Let it pass," cut in the artist. "You got the worst of it, so I ought to be satisfied."

"But I want to be friends. I am mixed up in this matter in a way, and I want to help you and Larry bring the guilty parties to justice."

"Oh, I see. All right, Gregory, we'll forget the past. But how under the sun are you mixed up in this?"

Gregory looked at Larry, and the boy looked at him. One word brought on another, and soon the artist was

in possession of all the particulars just as they have been chronicled here.

"You are right; Boughton and Lomax are undoubtedly the guilty parties, and the only ones," said Howard Bruin. "The thing is to prove it and recover the stolen stuff. I think it will be a comparatively easy matter."

"I had an idea we would not tell the police all we know, but work the case up privately," said Larry. "It seems to me the police around here do an awful lot of blundering."

"They are only country boys, that's all. In a place like this it does not pay the authorities to engage skilled men, for there is too little to do. A couple of New York or Chicago detectives would have had them long ago."

"You're right," said Gregory Kennington.

The three now observed two men coming along the road on foot, from the direction of Cleveland. Larry recognized one of them as Officer Angus.

"Here are the officers now," he exclaimed.

"That's so," said Howard Bruin. "Hullo, Angus!" he called out.

The officer addressed looked up, and stared at the artist in astonishment. Then both he and his companion came rushing forward.

"It's him!" cried Angus. "It's him, sure pop!"

"That's so, it's him," returned the other, who was a constable named Furlough.

"Where did you come from?" demanded Officer Angus abruptly.

"From Chicago," returned the artist, with a faint smile on his face. "I understand you are looking for me?"

"We have been searching everywhere for you; eh, Furlough?"

"Well, you didn't search in Chicago, or you would have found me at the Palmer House," laughed Howard Bruin.

"Don't you know you are wanted for robbery?"

"So I understand, Angus; but seriously now, do you think I would commit such a foul deed?"

"Well—I—that is——" stammered Officer Angus.

"Tell the truth."

"No, I don't—no gent like you would. But Mrs. Noxwell claims——"

"I know all about that, and all I can say is, so much the worse for Mrs. Noxwell. Now, what's to be done?"

"Well—I—I—will have to take you to Cleveland, now I've found you."

"To Justice Raum?"

"Yes."

"I do not object. I was going as it is. We will set

off at once, and stop at my house for a moment on the way. I wish to do that to quiet Maggie, who, no doubt, has been much worried over my disappearance. Come on."

A few minutes later, the artist, Larry, and the two officers of the law were on the way.

The housekeeper, Maggie, was almost overcome with joy upon Howard Bruin's reappearance.

"I told 'em you would come back!" she cried. "The villains, to call a gentleman like you a robber! I told 'em if they couldn't do no better, they had better resign, judge and all!"

"We will soon have this matter settled now, Maggie," replied the artist.

In a short while, the men and Larry were all seated in Howard Bruin's wagon and on the way to Cleveland. The morning was a bright and fresh one, and had there not been so much on Larry's mind he would have enjoyed the ride thoroughly. As it was, however, he was busy thinking of Boughton and Lomax, and speculating on what had become of the rascals.

There was a stir of surprise when Howard Bruin and Larry stopped in front of the police court and alighted, followed by Angus and Furlough. Many men gathered around, and various were the comments passed on the artist's appearance.

"There is Bruin at last."

"I wonder if Angus or Furlough caught him?"

"He don't look bad. Running away must have agreed with him."

"They take me for a first-class criminal," whispered the artist to Larry, as they elbowed their way into the court room, where the morning police session had just reached a conclusion.

Justice Raum was in his place behind the judge's railing and desk. He knew Howard Bruin and stared for an instant upon his appearance.

"Here is the——" began Officer Angus, but the artist cut him short.

"I have come to give myself up, and to ask for bail," said he. "I trust you will arrange the matter as speedily as possible."

"Who caught you?"

"No one; I never knew the police were looking for me until this morning."

"Humph! most extraordinary! Well, I will hear your story, Mr. Bruin."

Standing before the desk, Howard Bruin told all that he had to say. The missing message to Maggie had evidently caused all the trouble.

"And you plead not guilty?"

"I most certainly do, your honor."

"Are you willing to stand trial at once?"

Howard Bruin hesitated, and he and Larry held a whispered consultation.

"If you please, I would prefer to have my trial take

place at the same time as this young man's. I will furnish bail to any amount," was the artist's final answer.

"Very well. Bail will be fixed at one thousand dollars. Where is your bondsman?"

"I will go out with Officer Angus and obtain one inside of a quarter of an hour."

This was satisfactory, and the officer and Howard left, leaving Larry to face the eager crowd of questioners who had gathered around.

Inside of the specified time the artist returned. He had had no difficulty in getting a business friend to go on his bond. The papers were fixed up, and five minutes after he and Larry were once more in the street.

"Now where?" asked Larry, as they seated themselves in the wagon, and Howard Bruin took up the reins.

"To Dutch Henry's mill for clews," was the artist's reply.

CHAPTER XXI

BACK TO THE OLD MILL

"You see, from what you said of the meeting there between Pete Lomax and Luke Boughton, I fancy they may have some of the stolen stuff at the old mill," said Howard Bruin. "It would be a first rate place to which to take it."

"I think they took it there, too," said Larry. "But it's more than likely they took it away again."

"I think not, Larry."

"Why not? They must have known I would come back."

"Just so. And for that reason they would be too afraid of being seen and followed to have undertaken to cart off the stolen silverware, which must have been heavy."

"There is something in that, sir. Certainly, there won't be any harm in going."

As the two passed the grounds surrounding Mrs. Kennington's residence, Larry thought of the visit he had intended to pay the kind lady. He told the artist of it.

"Well, run in and see her," said Howard Bruin.

"In the meanwhile, I will give the horse a drink. The animal needs it."

So, while the artist drove to a convenient spot along the lake, Larry ran up the garden path and rang the front door bell.

"Oh, Larry, is that you?" exclaimed a voice through one of the low French windows, and the next instant Mrs. Kennington stepped out upon the piazza. "How are you feeling," she went on as she took his hand.

"First rate, ma'am. How are you?"

"I have quite recovered, thank you. But the shock was a severe one."

"Yes, it was, or it wouldn't have killed poor Tom."

"I was greatly pleased a while ago to hear something to your credit," went on Mrs. Kennington, in a lower tone. "Gregory tells me you and he have made up."

"Yes, ma'am."

"It is best. Gregory is a hot-headed boy usually, and I am glad to learn that he intends to take a different course. What great influence have you exercised over him, Larry?"

And Mrs. Kennington fairly beamed upon the homeless boy as she spoke.

"I'm sure I don't know," returned Larry, blushing, although he could not tell why. "Something seems to draw Gregory and me together, although for the life of me I couldn't tell you what it is. Can you?"

"Me? No, I cannot, but it must be the same thing that makes me take an interest in your behalf. I never before took such an interest in one who was a stranger but a short time before. And, by the way, Gregory tells me Mr. Bruin is back."

"Yes, and out on bail, like myself."

"I am glad to hear it; where is he now?"

"Waiting for me outside. We are going to try to run the real robbers down."

"I trust you succeed. Give him my best wishes, please."

Soon Larry and the artist were once more on the way. As they rode along the winding road to Carwell, the boy related what had been said at the meeting, and also what he knew concerning Gregory's secret.

"Mrs. Kennington is a fine woman, and her son would make a good fellow if he would take the right turn," observed Howard Bruin. "I can't understand where he gets his wild manner from at all. It isn't from his father."

"So you said before."

"No, his father was a fine man—every one who knew him spoke of that. My father knew him even better than I did. My father used to say that he was, in his younger years, quite jolly, but he lost all that when some sort of family affliction came upon him."

"You mean the loss of his other children—of Gregory's brothers and sisters."

"Yes; you see they died under rather peculiar circumstances. The family was in the East during the time, and Captain Kennington, as he was called, left the children in care of a nurse for a week or longer, while he and his wife attended the funeral of a relative in Virginia. When they came back they found that the nurse and all of the children had been taken sick, and been put out of the hotel at which they were stopping. The nurse had secured quarters in a back street, and one of the children was dead, and another was missing—the nurse was too sick to tell where it had gone, or who had taken it."

"Mr. and Mrs. Kennington must have felt pretty bad," put in Larry thoughtfully.

"They did. There was one child laid away in an unknown grave, another missing, and two sick."

"What did they do?"

"The captain, I believe, got a trained nurse and a good doctor for the sick ones, and then started to find the missing one, which was Gregory——"

"Oh, so they found him!"

"Yes, they finally found him with an Italian family in Brooklyn. The Italians were going to hold him for a reward, so it is said."

"They must have been former Italian brigands."

"That's so. The Italians fled, and Gregory was brought back home. He was only a wee baby at the time. Less than a week after the other two children

died, and that left the almost heart-broken mother and father with but one child out of four."

"Too bad!" murmured Larry in a choked voice. "No wonder Mrs. Kennington's face is so sad at times."

"You are right, and I presume that is why she puts up with so much from Gregory. He is all that is left to her."

"What became of the nurse?"

"She got better, and as soon as she was able to do so, she left the house and disappeared. She was afraid to face her former employers, for it was her going among her former low associates which brought on the malignant disease that brought death to three of her charges."

"And she was never heard of afterward?"

"No. I think her name was Matilda Rinsel."

"Matilda Rinsel. I never heard the name before," returned the boy, with a shake of his head. "She must have been much older than either you or I."

"Not so very. She was quite young when she was a nurse for the Kenningtons."

Presently they arrived at the spot where the somewhat grown-up path led to the river. They had come by a side road, which did not run through Carwell.

"Now, I'll have to tie up the horse and wagon," said the artist. "You can go ahead if you wish."

It was exactly noon, and the sun being directly over-

head, made the walk through the dense woods a fairly light one. It did not take Larry long to reach the old mill, and a thorough look around convinced him that no one was about.

"Well, see anybody?" questioned Howard Bruin as he came up.

"Not a soul, and I didn't expect to," replied Larry. "They knew better than to come back."

"We will start on the outside of the mill first, in our search. Do not allow a foot of the ground to escape your notice."

"All right. I'll start up the stream and you can go down. We'll work in a semicircle from the river, around the mill, to the river again."

This plan was adopted, and soon both were moving about, their heads close to the ground, as if their very lives depended on the thoroughness of their investigations.

Larry, having started up the stream, found himself on ground that was thick with loose stones, and brush of half a dozen varieties. There were also a number of treacherous holes, and it was not long before he slipped into one of these with such force that his left ankle received quite a severe sprain.

He gave a low cry of pain, which reached the ears of Howard Bruin, who at once came rushing around the mill, demanding to know what was the matter.

"Nothing much," returned Larry. "I was foolish

enough to slip into a hole and hurt my ankle a bit. It's all right now."

"I thought you had discovered something," said the artist, somewhat disappointed. "I can't say that——"

"I have discovered something!" almost shouted Larry. "Look here!"

He dove his hand down into the hole into which he had slipped, and presently brought to light the top of a gold and silver sugar bowl!

CHAPTER XXII

SOMETHING IS FOUND AND STOLEN

"A SUGAR bowl top!" exclaimed Howard Bruin, as he gazed at the article in Larry's hand. "You have struck the right place, my boy, beyond a doubt."

"Do you recognize it as belonging to Mrs. Noxwell?" questioned Larry with deep interest, as he turned the top over in his hand.

"I think I do; but see if it has not the Noxwell coat of arms on it—a cross within a crown, and two deer heads on either side."

"Yes, here you are."

Larry handed over the sugar bowl top, and pointed out the engraved portion to the artist, who examined it carefully.

"The Noxwells' without a doubt," declared he. "How much more of the plate is down in that hole?"

"That I don't know. But I'll soon find out. The top was lying on a big flat stone. Perhaps there is more of the stuff under the stone."

"Shall I help you remove it?"

"If you can. It's rather cramped down here."

Larry still stood at the bottom of the opening, which had been concealed by a mass of overhanging brush. Howard Bruin was soon beside him, and together they tugged at the flat stone, and presently succeeded in overturning it.

Their work was without recompense, however, for there was nothing beneath but soft ground, filled with worms.

"Bait," said Larry laconically.

"Yes, but that is not what we are after," returned Howard Bruin, in a disappointed tone. "There isn't a thing but this top, is there?"

"Not a thing. I fancy the plate was placed in here loosely and removed not long since. In the haste of the removal the sugar bowl top was dropped."

"That must certainly be it. Of course it was Lomax and Boughton who hid the booty here, and the question is, where did they remove it to?"

"Here are some footprints in the soft ground," returned Larry, as he began a minute examination about the edges of the hole. "Do you see them?"

"I do. They lead off in that direction, and they are made by two pairs of feet."

"Lomax's and Boughton's, and they carried a bag or a box between them. That must have contained the silver plate."

"Let us follow the footprints and see where they fetch up."

This suggestion was carried out, and at the end of ten minutes the boy and the artist found themselves at the mouth of a cleft in the rocks, at a point several hundred yards up the stream.

Here the footprints entered on hard ground and stone and could no longer be followed.

"That's the end of this trail," remarked Howard Bruin, as he gazed around the rocks. "It looks as if they crossed the river in a boat from this point."

"No, I am satisfied they did not cross the river—at least not after those two farmers and myself got after them," replied Larry positively. "They had enough of the rough water and took to the road instead."

Larry approached the cleft in the rocks, and picking up a pointed stick began to poke around, first in one corner and then in another. This move at first only dislodged a few loose stones and brought to light a number of small and harmless snakes, which, however, caused both to jump around in a lively way, until the reptiles had slunk out of sight.

"See anything?" questioned the artist, who had moved off on something which he thought might be the continuation of the trail.

"Not yet, sir, but it's in my mind they stopped here to do something. Now if we—goodness gracious! Look out!"

Larry sprang back in alarm and Howard Bruin did the same. Almost at the same time a huge rock fell

away from the side of the cleft, revealing an irregular opening about three feet square!

"Phew! but that was a narrow escape!" cried Howard Bruin, after the slab of rock had settled itself. "Did it catch your foot, Larry?"

"Not quite, but as you say, it was a close shave. Look what a hole the rock left. It looks like a regular cave."

"Perhaps it is a cave!" ejaculated the artist. "And if so, it's just the place those robbers would choose in which to conceal the stolen plate."

"That's so, for a fact! I'm going in and make a search. I wish I had a lantern; it's as dark as Egypt in there."

"I have a number of wax matches, and they will answer fairly well. Here, I will divide with you, and will follow on your heels. Look out now, so you don't get a rock on your head or fall into a den of rattlesnakes."

Larry shivered at the reference to the deadly reptiles, yet he did not hesitate, but taking the wax matches the artist offered him, he lit one and entered the small opening before him.

Of course he could do little more than crawl on his hands and knees, but before he had gone a distance of ten feet, he found the opening growing larger, and presently he stood in a regular cave, apparently ten feet square, and six to eight feet high.

The flooring of the cave was very irregular, as was also the ceiling, which was apparently not over four feet below the surface of the rock overhead. A dim light streamed in through several crevices, opening upward on a slant.

But what interested Larry and Howard Bruin more than anything else was a big bag lying in one corner of the cavern. It was a bag twice the size of an ordinary mail pouch, and made of rubber and oilcloth. One end of the bag was tied up with a stout piece of twine, and the ends of this twine were sealed.

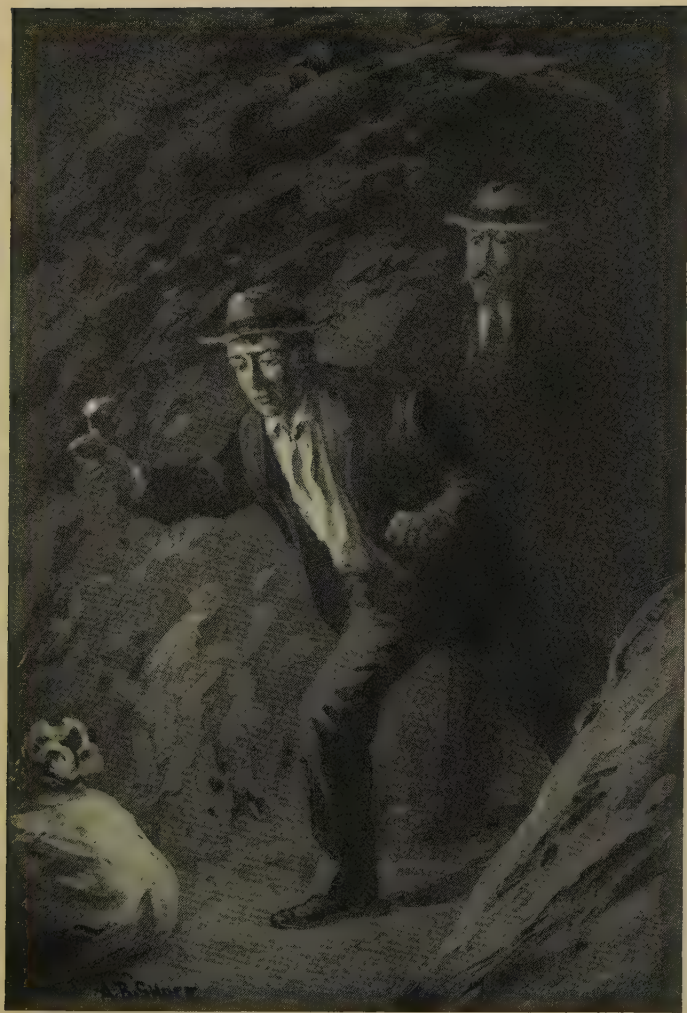
"This must be the stolen stuff!" shouted Larry, enthusiastically. "But why in the world did they seal it up?"

"They would not trust each other, and had not time to take a careful inventory of what the bag contained," was the artist's reply. "So they tied up the bag, and each put the seal of his ring or watch charm on it, so that the other couldn't open the bag during his absence. It is a case of a thief not trusting a thief."

"I see. But haven't we a perfect right to open the bag?"

"I suppose so, but as we are suspected of this robbery, perhaps we had better place this in the hands of the police just as it is."

"Well, just as you say, sir," returned the boy, although somewhat disappointed. "It's mighty



“This must be the stolen stuff!” shouted Larry. — *Page 184.*

heavy!" he went on, as he picked up one end of the bag.

"Yes, it is heavy," added the artist, as he caught hold also. "And by its general appearance I cannot imagine what it can contain, if not the stolen plate."

"I wonder if it's got the stolen papers in it also?"

"That remains to be seen. I hope it has."

"Won't it be to your interest if the papers do not turn up?"

"Possibly, but I would rather have Mrs. Noxwell recover them and then beat her in the lawsuit, after all. My lawyer claims I have a sure thing of it, and it is certainly preposterous for that woman to think I would descend so low as to rob her of the papers."

"What shall we do with the bag?"

"Let us drag it out into the daylight. Perhaps we can place it in my wagon and take it to Cleveland at once."

By this time all their wax matches were burned up, and it was in the darkness that they had to take up their find and transfer it to the open air.

"Even if we don't find Lomax and Boughton, they will be greatly astonished to learn that their booty is missing," laughed Larry. "Fancy Pete Lomax's face when he discovers that his little game has ended in failure."

"We must not give up the search for the robbers," said Howard Bruin decidedly. "They must be caught

by all means. If we simply restore the stolen stuff and do not catch the robbers we will only be about half cleared. Mrs. Noxwell may say we simply gave back the plate and papers because we got frightened."

"That's so. She is just mean enough."

"We will take this bag to the wagon," went on Howard Bruin. "Then supposing we return to the old mill and see if we cannot find some clew which will lead to a knowledge of the whereabouts of Lomax and Boughton? The fact that you found a letter there gives me hope that we will find something more."

"That's a good plan, sir. Come, let us hurry with the bag, for there is no time to lose."

Once again they took up their heavy burden and started off along the neglected path to where the horse and wagon had been left tied up.

The bag was placed very carefully under the seat and covered with a blanket.

"There, I reckon it will be safe until we come back again," remarked the artist, as they set their faces once more toward the old mill.

Hardly had Larry and Howard Bruin disappeared from view when the bushes close at hand opened, and Pete Lomax and Luke Boughton stole into the little opening.

"It was a good thing that we came back to watch the place," exclaimed Lomax in a low undertone. "If we hadn't done that we should have been sold out com-

pletely. How they ever stumbled on that hiding place beats me."

"There is no time to talk it over now," growled Boughton, as he began to untie the horse. "Jump in; we haven't a minute to spare."

Lomax did as directed. A few seconds later Boughton hopped up beside him, and off the pair of rascals drove, in Howard Bruin's wagon, taking the bag of stolen goods with them.

CHAPTER XXIII

AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY

ALL unconscious of what had taken place after they had left the bag of stolen plate safe in the wagon, Howard Bruin and Larry proceeded with all haste to the old mill.

"I don't think it advisable to hunt around any more outside," said the artist. "It isn't likely that there's another bag of stolen stuff around."

"That's so," returned Larry, "we had better confine our search to the old mill. I have an idea that Pete Lomax made it a hanging-out place whenever he thought it unsafe to appear in Cleveland or elsewhere."

"That would not be strange. A fellow of that description is more or less of an outcast, and an outcast doesn't care how lonely a place is, so long as it is secure from intrusion—which didn't happen to be in this case."

And Howard Bruin gave a short laugh at his last words.

"I can't understand how Gregory Kennington ever

fell in with him," observed Larry, with a thoughtful shake of his head. "The two are as different as day is from night."

"And Pete Lomax's hold on him must be pretty strong, or he would make more of an effort to shake it off," added the artist.

When they entered the ground floor of the old mill their first movement was to throw open every door and window to its widest, so as to admit all the light possible. This was an easy matter, as most of the doors and windows were open already.

The two men began a systematic search in every nook and corner of the ground apartment. Not a box or pantry was left unsearched, and Larry even stirred over a heap of moldy shavings and sawdust that had apparently not been disturbed for years.

But, to their disappointment, nothing was found there. Then they ascended the rickety stairs and entered the apartment where Lomax and Boughton had held their all-important interview.

"Look out for the wasps!" sang out Larry. "They'll prove ugly customers to combat if we rouse them up."

"Never fear, I'll be on my guard. I was stung once in my barn, and that was enough."

The search now began with renewed earnestness, as this was the very place that Larry had found the scrap of paper relating to Gregory Kennington. In one cor-

ner a heap of old news and other papers were found, and under them more scraps of paper, upon which appeared faded writing in several different hands.

"These may be worthless, or of great value," said Howard Bruin, as Larry called his attention to the scraps of paper. "Pick them all up in your hat and bring them to the light."

The scraps were some twenty in number. Some were quite small, and others nearly a quarter of a sheet of note paper in size. In less than five minutes Larry had every one of them in his possession.

The two proceeded downstairs and out into the open air, and here the scraps were laid out on a flat rock, and the two essayed to piece them together.

"There are three different handwritings here, so we can divide the scraps into three lots, according to the different hands. Then we can take one lot at a time and see what we can make of it."

"This lot is in the same handwriting as the note sent to Gregory Kennington!" exclaimed Larry, after an inspection of the piles. "See what a queer shape that capital letter is? It was the same on the bit of note."

"We will put this note together first, then," returned the artist, and this was done.

"It's not all here," said Larry, after they had been at work for several minutes.

As much as they had of the letter read as follows:

“——will be on hand to see you. His name was ——that’s what he was called——can make an easy deal with him I feel su——Lomax.”

“This is from Lomax to some one else,” observed Howard Bruin. “I wonder whom he has reference to?”

“Maybe me,” said Larry, with a clouded brow. “It’s a good deal of a mystery. Perhaps the letter is one sent by Lomax to Boughton or another robber.”

They now began to put the second lot of bits together. But when they had been all placed, the letter proved of no value, but merely spoke of an order for dressed lumber.

“That belonged to the miller before he left here,” said the artist. “We will now see what the last lot brings forth.”

This was done. It was hard work to get the bits together, as they were much soiled and crumpled. But at last the task was completed, and the following lay before them:

“Mr. Boughton: I will be in Carwell to see you next Thursday at the——or at the——if it is all right——I can easily identify the boy——plenty of money, and I must have my share——he is ignorant of this——rather strange——no use to go to the hospital——in cash only.

“JOSH — — MALL.”

"What!" shouted Larry, springing to his feet in amazement. "Can it be possible?"

"Can what be possible?" asked Howard Bruin in wonder.

"See that signature? Complete, it would be Joshua Small."

"Well, I think so myself; but what of that?"

"Didn't I once tell you that Joshua Small was the man I was working for after I got out of the industrial institution?"

"Come to think of it, I believe you did."

"This letter was sent to Luke Boughton by him," went on Larry excitedly. "And I'll bet a new hat it refers to me, and so does that other letter. The first letter is from Lomax to Boughton, stating that Small is coming to see him about me, and this states he is coming on to identify me. But what about plenty of cash?" and Larry's brow grew more perplexed than ever.

"The letter states you are ignorant of something," replied Howard Bruin, with deep interest. "That is, if you are the person meant."

"I am ignorant of my past life," said the boy bitterly. "Who knows but that Small has discovered something—there, I have it! Why in the world didn't I think of it before?"

As Larry spoke he struck a fist in his open hand, and his face brightened up wonderfully.

"Have what? It seems to me you are making lots of discoveries just now."

"So I am. Do you remember me saying that I thought I had seen Pete Lomax before? Well, I am right. I have seen him before. He called on Joshua Small two or three times. I did not see much of him, but I saw enough to remember his face, now that it is brought back to my mind."

"Then he and this Small must be in league in some way."

"Yes, and this Boughton is in with them, too. I said Small was a very mean man, but I must say I never thought him dishonest."

"It looks to me as if he was going to sell his secret to Boughton for a certain price," observed the artist thoughtfully. "Now, he wouldn't set a price unless the secret was worth something."

"It's certainly a puzzle, Mr. Bruin, but I'm dead sure I'm the boy mentioned, and this makes it all the more important that we catch the robbers."

"Well, we have spent too much time over the letters," said the artist, springing up. "Come, we will finish our search without delay."

They repaired again to the old mill, and in the course of the next half hour went over every portion of the upper part of the structure carefully. Nothing more of importance came to light, and soon after they set

out on their return to where the horse and wagon had been left standing.

"Can it be possible that Joshua Small can have had anything to do with the robbery?" questioned Howard Bruin, as they pushed along the half-obliterated path-way.

"I hardly think that, sir," replied Larry. "There were only two seals on the bag, if you remember. I think that proves that there were only two concerned in the robbery."

"That is true. I had forgotten about the seals. I rather imagine Justice Raum will be astonished when he hears of our find."

"I am anxious to learn if those papers are in the bag. If they are not——"

Larry came to a sudden stop, and both he and Howard Bruin looked at each other in dismay. They had discovered that the horse and wagon had disappeared.

CHAPTER XXIV

ON THE ROAD ONCE MORE

“GONE!”

The word sprang from the lips of Larry and Howard Bruin simultaneously. The horse and wagon had vanished, and also the bag of stolen plate.

“Who could have taken my turnout?” asked Howard Bruin. “Lomax or Boughton?”

“Both, most likely,” said Larry bitterly. “How foolish we were to leave it there unguarded.”

“Perhaps the horse got loose and wandered away of his own accord,” suggested the artist, hoping against hope. “Let us make the inspection.”

This was easily done. The ground all about was soft and full of footprints, and some of these the keen-eyed boy soon recognized.

“These are the same footprints which led up to the cave. Beyond a doubt, Lomax and Boughton have stolen your turnout and made off with it.”

“If they did that they must have been watching us all the while!” cried the artist excitedly.

“True; and now they again have the bag of stolen stuff in their possession.”

Both wondered how long the turnout had been gone, and what direction the thieves had taken.

"One thing is certain, it won't do to waste time here; we must be after them," said Larry decidedly. "Come on as far as the road. We may find some clew there."

So on as far as the main road they went. On looking up and down as far as the eye could see, all was deserted. But presently, from a distance, a farmer's wagon hove into sight.

On the seat was an old man half asleep. As he came opposite to them, Larry hailed him, and asked him if he had seen anything of Howard Bruin's turnout, describing both the horse and wagon at the same time.

The old farmer shook his head.

"Didn't pass no wagon 'ceptin' Joel Bangor's, with a load o' feed on," he said. "You see, thar ain't much travelin' done in these parts, nohow."

"Then will you take us with you for a short distance?" broke in Howard Bruin eagerly. "I am after a couple of chaps who stole my horse and wagon. I will pay you well for your trouble."

"Gosh, so they stole your team, eh?"

"Yes."

"Then hop in and we'll spin after 'em. I don't want no pay, Mr. Bruin."

"Ah, you know me, I see."

"Ye-as. I'm old Dick Andrews, of Carwell. Don't you remember me an' that harness trade 'bout a year ago?"

"Oh, yes; you got the best of the trade, too," and the artist smiled faintly.

"Ha! ha! I ruther think I did!" roared the old farmer. "So I can afford to tote you two along fer nuthin', can't I? Hop in an' we'll be off."

Howard Bruin and Larry needed no second invitation. They sprang up beside old Dick Andrews, who at once whipped up his horse—rather a fine-looking animal—and away they went.

The old farmer wished to know all the particulars of the theft of the wagon, but the artist told him no more than was actually necessary under the circumstances.

"If they came this way, they might have turned off at a number of places," said Larry.

"That's so, boy," said Dick Andrews. "But it an't likely they would leave the main road unless they was putty well acquainted with the country round-about."

"Where are you bound?" put in Howard Bruin, his eyes on all the side roads that were passed.

"I'm goin' straight to Carwell," was the farmer's reply.

"I have an idea," said the artist to Larry. "Supposing you keep on to Carwell, and I drop off at the

next cross-roads and begin investigations along the way. If we separate, our chances of finding them will be just doubled."

"I am willing, sir, but won't you be afraid to tackle them alone?"

"If I find they look dangerous, I will simply keep my eye on them until I can summon help. Here we are at the cross road to Landsdown. Good-by!"

The artist sprang down, and the next moment was striding down the cross road with rapid steps.

"He's a fine fellow," observed old Dick Andrews, as he whipped up his horse once more. "I hope he gits thet rig o' his back ag'in."

"I don't know if the thieves would dare drive into Carwell," said Larry. "But I might as well go there as anywhere. In the absence of clues, it's as well to set out in one direction as in another."

On and on the farm wagon rattled, until finally the outskirts of Carwell appeared, and soon the pretty white church—the first building on the road—was passed, and they entered on the main street.

"You're having high old times here," remarked Larry, as the sight of a group of idle men standing on a corner put him in mind that a strike was in progress at the car shops.

"Ye-as, finer 'n we want 'em," growled the old farmer. "Fust thing we know the car shop people and their workmen will have a pitched battle, an' then

there won't be no tellin' where the matter will end. I tell you, I wish the matter was settled, bless me if I don't."

"Who is to blame in the matter?"

"Both sides. The firm is meaner 'n dirt, and the workmen want the earth, to put it short. Say, where do you want to go?"

"You may as well set me down right here."

"Can't I help you no more?"

"I don't think you can, thank you."

The two separated, and Dick Andrews drove off toward his home, which was on the opposite side of the town.

Larry noticed that the men and boys standing about eyed him curiously, as he passed along. But he kept on his guard, resolved, if possible, to avoid any unnecessary trouble with the strikers.

"Hullo! back again?" called a voice to him presently, and Larry found the speaker was the boy who had before challenged him.

"Yes," returned Larry coolly.

"Did you catch that fellow on horseback you were after yesterday?"

"No, I did not. I am looking for him again. I have an idea he came back to Carwell in a wagon with another man."

"When?"

"Just a while ago."

"There were a couple of men passed through only half an hour ago."

"What kind of horse did they have?"

"A white and gray, and the wagon had a red and yellow body."

"That's the rig!" cried Larry. "You didn't notice the two men?"

"I believe one of them had a red beard."

"Those are the chaps I am after. Where did they go?"

"Went up the road past the car shops."

"In that direction?"

"Yes; but hold up!" and the boy caught Larry by the arm.

"What's the matter now?"

"You had better not go that way."

"Why not?"

"There is a gang of strikers up there, and they mean trouble. You will get hurt if you go."

"But I'm not here to interfere in this matter—I'll give you my word of honor I'm not."

The other smiled. Now that he was alone with Larry, he did not appear half so tough as formerly, and, indeed, his manner of speech was very much modified.

"Well, I believe you, but some of 'em won't, they're so worked up over this difficulty."

"See here!" exclaimed Larry, as a sudden thought

struck him. "Can't you come with me and explain matters if they stop me? I want to catch those thieves, and if I do, I'll promise that you shall be well paid for the trouble you take in my behalf."

"I'll do that, sure as my name is Nick Dennitt. What's your handle?"

"Larry Curly."

"All right, Larry; come on, I'll show you where that wagon went."

Nick Dennitt started to walk down the street, when suddenly Larry caught him by the shoulder.

"Wait a minute, I want to get out of the way!" he exclaimed. "I don't want that man across the way to see me!"

The man Larry referred to had just put in an appearance around an opposite corner. It was the boy's former employer, Joshua Small!

CHAPTER XXV

A LIVELY MEETING

As soon as he caught sight of Joshua Small, Larry jumped out of sight behind a tree, and instinctively Nick Dennitt followed suit.

"What's the matter with that man?" asked the big boy. "He ain't one of them men you're after, is he?"

"He's not one of the two, but he's a man I am after nevertheless," replied Larry, as he kept his keen eyes fixed on the movements of his former employer.

"Seems to me you are after 'most every one in town," remarked Nick Dennitt suspiciously.

"Hardly," laughed Larry. "But I'm after that man sure—almost more so than after the others."

"Well, why don't you go out and meet him?"

"I want to watch him and see where he goes."

By this time Joshua Small had passed the corner and was making his way down a somewhat deserted side street. He walked along rather slowly, as one unaccustomed to the locality, and fearful of making some mistake.

"I'm going to follow him," said Larry to the big boy. "I won't want your services just now."

"You won't, eh? How about that reward?"

"I won't forget you, Nick. And here is a quarter in the meantime."

Nick Dennitt pounced on the piece of silver Larry fished from his pocket, and then the two separated.

Making sure that he was not seen, Larry cautiously left his hiding place and followed Joshua Small along the side street.

After walking a distance of several hundred feet, the man turned into an irregular lane, which ran down to the river bank. Here were situated a number of storehouses belonging to the car company, and beyond them was a brick building, which had, in former years, done duty as a varnish works.

Joshua Small paused in front of the brick building and gazed suspiciously along the lane and up and down the river bank. Larry at once sprang out of sight behind a pile of rubbish, and he was not seen.

In another moment Joshua Small had pushed open the door of the deserted varnish works and entered the building.

He left the door open behind him, and at first Larry thought of following him inside.

But while the boy was deliberating, Joshua Small came to the door again and looked up the lane suspiciously.

Seeing no one, he came out and walked off toward the river.

"He is waiting for Lomax and Boughton," thought Larry. "This is to be the meeting place. I'll wait and see what happens next."

Nearly five minutes passed. Joshua Small, after walking to the water's edge, came back slowly. Larry watched him closely, and at last saw the man's face brighten.

Then Joshua Small emitted a short, shrill whistle.

Almost immediately came back an answering whistle from up the lane, and Pete Lomax appeared in sight.

With swift steps the robber approached and shook Joshua Small by the hand.

"Been waiting long?" he asked.

"Have I?" exclaimed Joshua Small. "I've been in town since early morning. I waited at the hotel till I was tired."

"Come on in the varnish works."

"Can't we walk around? It don't smell very well in there."

"Can't help it, Josh. I don't want to be seen around here."

"Been up to some of your tricks, eh?"

"Never mind; I don't want to be seen, that's all."

"Certainly, certainly," returned Joshua Small nervously. "I'll go in if you say so."

Pete Lomax led the way, and the pair passed out of Larry's sight and hearing.

The boy was undecided what to do, but only for an

instant. Then he made a *détour* and came up in the rear of the building.

Here were a number of iron shutters. They were rusty from age, and several stood partly open. Climbing up on a handy pile of railroad ties, Larry peered into the nearest window.

All was dark inside, and he realized at once that this was a different apartment from the one Lomax and his former employer had entered.

"I'll venture it," said Larry to himself and, climbing between the iron shutters, he lowered himself inside the building. He made no noise, and as soon as he struck the floor he listened intently. He heard the murmur of voices from close at hand, and was able, presently, to distinguish what was being said.

"But ten thousand dollars is a pile of money, Josh," came to his ears in Lomax's voice.

"That's so, I know it," returned Joshua Small. "But jess see what you and Boughton mean to make out of it!"

"We may not make anything out of it."

Joshua Small gave a contemptuous laugh.

"I ain't worried about it," he said. "You and Boughton wouldn't go into it at all unless you were pretty sure of what you were doing."

"Yes, but matters have changed since we saw you last, Josh—changed for the worse."

"How?"

"Well, I don't care to say—but this much I will say; it will be ten times harder for us to make the deal now than it would have been a couple of weeks ago."

"That ain't my fault."

"I don't say it is—but if we've got to pay you too much, perhaps we would rather drop the matter."

At this juncture there was a noise outside and both sprang to the door to see who was coming.

The new arrival was Luke Boughton. He breathed heavily and was dripping with perspiration.

"Confound this strike!" he exclaimed. "The car-shop hands watch a fellow like a cat watches a mouse. I don't know whether I've been followed or not."

"Is it safe?" questioned Lomax significantly.

"Yes."

"And the horse and wagon?"

"All right too." Luke Boughton shook hands with Joshua Small. "On hand, I see."

"Yes, and ready for business."

"Well, we can't do business here, Small."

"Why not?"

"On account of the strike, which has upset the whole town, and—on account of another matter."

"But where shall we go?" questioned Joshua Small, considerably disturbed.

"Look here, supposing we separate, to meet in Chicago one week from to-day. Believe me, that will be

the best for all hands. As affairs stand now, Pete and I cannot push matters. Ain't that so, Pete?"

"Exactly so."

"But I don't feel like going to Chicago," replied Larry's former employer. "I ought to be back in New York State now."

"Well, but——" began Boughton. "What's that?"

He asked the question hurriedly, as a loud shouting from outside reached their ears. All three of the men rushed to the door.

"A fight among the strikers and the new hands!" exclaimed Pete Lomax. "Look at the sticks and stones fly! Somebody will be killed soon!"

"They are coming this way!" shrieked Joshua Small. "Oh! what shall we do? I do not wish to be mixed up in this row."

"We'll get into the next room and bolt the door, returned Luke Boughton hurriedly. "Come on, quick!"

He ran to the door and threw it open. Larry had no time to retreat.

"By Jove! You?" howled Lomax, who was directly behind him.

"Here's the boy who followed us to the mill!"

"A boy?" said Joshua Small, as he crowded into the room and slammed the door behind him. "Well, by gum! Larry!" he fairly shouted.

"Yes, Mr. Small," returned the boy, as coolly as he could.

Lomax and Boughton looked at each other significantly.

"Is he the boy?" questioned the latter, turning to Joshua Small.

"Yes."

"Well, I'll be jiggered," muttered Boughton; and his words meant a good deal.

CHAPTER XXVI

FLIGHT

LARRY was deeply interested in the scene between the two robbers and his former employer, Joshua Small. It proved to him, beyond a doubt, that he was the boy mentioned in the letters found in the old mill.

And this being so, he was doubly anxious to learn the particulars of the secret Joshua Small possessed, and which Lomax and Boughton were to purchase, as an investment, out of which to secure a fortune.

"This is the boy beyond a doubt, eh?" said Pete Lomax.

"Yes, that's Larry," returned Joshua Small.

"The boy from the hospital and the institution?"

The farmer from New York State nodded. Then he turned to the boy.

"Look here, Larry, what did you want to run away from me for?"

"Got tired of the hard life you led me," responded the wanderer coolly.

He felt satisfied that Joshua Small could no longer hold him as what he had been pleased to term "a bound boy."

"I've had a hard time a-tracin' of you!"

"It was a pity you took the trouble, Mr. Small."

"Was it?" snarled Joshua Small. "Did you think I was goin' to let you go so easily?"

"I didn't think at all. I wanted to go, and I went. That's simple enough, isn't it?"

"You had no right to go."

"That's a matter of opinion."

"I can have you arrested for going away."

"Go ahead and try it," returned Larry recklessly.

"You dare me?" howled Joshua Small, his anger rising.

Larry appeared to be quite a different boy from what he had been when a slave on the farm.

"I certainly do, Mr. Small. By the way, let me ask a question. What are you doing here in the company of these two robbers?"

"Robbers!" gasped Joshua Small, turning slightly pale.

"Shut up!" put in Luke Boughton roughly. "The boy doesn't know what he is talking about."

"Yes, I do," returned Larry. "You and Lomax there robbed Mrs. Nox——"

"Will you shut up?" hissed Boughton fiercely; and he struck out with his fist, aiming a blow at Larry's head.

The boy dodged, and tried to retreat. But now

Lomax caught hold of him, and in a trice the two men had thrown the youth to the floor.

"We'll bind and gag him!" said Boughton. "He won't be able to——"

A loud shouting outside caused him to break off. In the excitement attending the unexpected meeting, all inside of the varnish works had forgotten about the row of the car-works people in the lane.

A sudden crash followed the shouting, and then the door of the outer apartment was burst open, and half a dozen men and grown up boys poured into the place.

"Down with the scabs!"

"Don't let him go, fellers! He's takin' the bread out of honest men's mouths!"

"Let up on me!" yelled a tall, raw-boned individual. "Let up, or it will be the worse for all hands. I got the job fairly, and——"

A chorus of derisive howls drowned out the remainder of the speech, and a fierce fight began to wage inside of the varnish works.

"We must leave here!" said Joshua Small, whose face was white with terror. "Somebody will be killed!"

"Yes, we'll get out," returned Boughton.

"And we'll take the boy with us."

He turned to Larry.

"Get out of the window, and in double-quick time, boy!"

Larry stood up and faced the trio. As he did so, there came another crash, and three men, two fighting the one, sprawled into the space between him and his tormentors.

"Stop the fighting!" sang out the boy clearly. "Stop, I say! Here is more important work to do!"

The three men, astonished to find the inner shop occupied, left off wrangling for a moment, and stared first at the boy, and then at the men confronting him.

"What's that?" asked the tallest of the trio.

"Help me capture those three men," went on Larry.

"Capture them? Are they scabs?"

"Worse than that. They are robbers, at least two of them are. Do not let them get away if you want to earn a big reward."

The mention of robbers and a reward made the three men forget all about their own quarrel, and they crowded about Larry.

"Who did they rob?"

"Those two robbed Mrs. Noxwell's residence a few nights ago, and that man is in league with them."

"I heard of that robbery," said one of the men. "You are sure they are the guilty parties?"

"Positive. It is big money in your pockets to bring them to justice."

"It is, eh? Then here goes for that money. Come on, Bill! Never mind Quitman now."

"But Quitman is going to have a hand in this," said the third man.

The three men rushed upon Joshua Small, Lomax, and Boughton, and Larry jumped in to aid them.

But now more men and some boys poured into the apartment, and sticks and stones, as well as lumps of soft mud, flew in all directions.

In the *melée*, Larry became separated from the men he was after, and although he tried his best, he could not again find them.

He became mixed up in a crowd of the strikers, who took him for a "scab," and attacked him vigorously from all sides.

He fought them off as best he could, but received a blow in the face, and another in the neck which all but stunned him.

At last, seeing it was useless to attempt to fight his way clear, he began to retreat, and it was not long before he had left all of the crowd behind him.

He looked around in vain for Lomax and the others, but could see nothing of them.

"Got away, I'll bet a button," he groaned. "Was there ever such luck? And just at the moment, too, when I thought I was going to get to the bottom of this secret which surrounds my life."

As Larry made his way still farther from the scene of battle, his thoughts were busy. Who was he, and why were these three men so interested in his future?

What in the world did it mean, this striving to get him in their power? And what of this money that was mentioned so frequently?

"There may be money coming to me," he thought. "If there is, I must say I would like to get hold of it. I've been poor long enough, goodness knows!"

There was a large lump behind his ear, left there by the cruel blow he had received from one of the strikers. Going down to the edge of the river, the boy wet his handkerchief and began to bathe the injured part.

He felt satisfied that none of the three men he was after had been caught. The question then was: Where had they gone?

"For all I know, they may be off for Chicago," was his mental comment. "I'm pretty sure that is where Lomax and Boughton would go, even if Joshua Small refused to follow. What a cunning rascal that farmer must be! I would like to trip him up, just to get square for some of those thrashings he used to give me."

When the lump on his neck felt somewhat easier, Larry washed his face, and then continued on his way to the main part of Carwell. He was determined, if possible, to trace up the whereabouts of Howard Bruin's wagon, and the bag of stolen plate.

Fortunately, the quarrel down by the varnish works had taken all of the strikers to that locality, so there

remained no one to molest him as he walked past the various stores and dwellings.

Meeting no one, he attempted to go into several stores and inquire of those in charge if they had seen the wagon pass earlier in the day, but in this endeavor he was disappointed. Every place of business was locked up, and the shop-keepers who had shutters had placed them in position to protect their window glass.

"The strikers rule the town, and no mistake," he said to himself. "No doubt the tradespeople will be glad when the difficulty is settled."

Presently Larry found himself at the extreme western outskirt of Carwell. A crooked road lay before him, leading to he knew not where.

"Now, what's to be done?" he thought. "Shall I go back?"

The question answered itself, as a horse and wagon dashed into view. It was Howard Bruin's turnout, and on the seat sat Pete Lomax!

CHAPTER XXVII

THE CAPTURE

THE wagon containing Lomax came along at a spanking gait, and Larry had no time to consider what was best to do in the matter. There was one of the robbers in sight, in fact, in possession of the stolen rig, and whatever was to be done must be done quickly.

It would do no good to shout at Lomax. Probably he would only drive the faster, and once out of sight, there was no surmising where he would go.

But as we well know, Larry was an unusually shrewd boy. He appeared to think of just the right thing to do. Without opening his mouth to yell, he made a dash for the rear end of the wagon, as it whirled past, and caught hold of the tail-board.

He was dragged forward for several yards. Then he pulled up his lower limbs and rested his feet on the rear axle. For the time being he was safe.

Lomax had not seen him thus far, and the boy did his utmost to keep out of sight. The position was not a comfortable one, for the wagon jolted roughly over the loose stones, and a thick cloud of dust arose, which almost choked him; but now was no time for complaining.

"I'll stick to him this time, sure pop!" was Larry's mental resolve, and he meant it.

Lomax appeared to be thoroughly alarmed, for he kept whipping the horse continually, even when the animal was apparently doing his best to make time. Evidently, the man was under the impression that he was being followed.

"I hope he is," said Larry to himself. "I shall have my hands full capturing him alone."

After a mile had been passed, and while Lomax was urging the horse to keep up his swift gait, Larry pulled himself up and peered under the seat of the wagon.

It was then that he made the dismaying discovery that the bag of stolen plate was gone.

"I might have known it," he groaned. "They wouldn't be as foolish as Mr. Bruin and I were, and leave it under the seat. I suppose he and Boughton have hidden it till matters take a quieter turn."

On and on went the wagon, as rapidly as ever, until Larry judged that they must be all of five miles from Carwell, and about the same distance from Spurnham. But on what road they were, and where they would come out, he had not the least idea.

Thus far they had passed no houses, but now they came in sight of a long row of shanties, backed up by half a dozen deserted factories.

The shanties were, with one exception, tenantless. The exception was occupied by a German family, the

mother and six young children of which were out in the road as the wagon drove past.

"Stealin' a ride! Stealin' a ride!" shouted a flaxen-haired boy at Larry, as they sped by.

The other children took up the cry, until the chorus attracted Pete Lomax's attention.

"Git off there!" he cried, without seeing who the rider behind was.

To this command Larry paid no attention, and he also took good care to keep out of sight as before.

"Did you hear what I said?" yelled Lomax. "I ain't carrying any free passengers this trip."

Larry continued to keep silent. By this time the row of shanties was left behind, and the cries of the children had ceased.

"They must have been trying to fool me," muttered the robber. "I reckon there ain't anybody on."

Again he lashed the horse, and once more they began to move along at full speed.

Presently a bit of up-hill road was struck. Here the dust lay deep, and it was all the tired horse could do to make headway that was satisfactory to Lomax.

The dust was kicked in a perfect cloud. Larry tried to avoid it, but his effort was in vain. The blinding mass got into his eyes and ears and finally into his nose.

The result was, first a smothered sneeze, and then several loud ones, which would have been heard quite

plainly by a man with far less acute ears than those of Pete Lomax.

The robber jumped up on the seat, and then called on the horse to stop.

"Come, now, show yourself!" he called out. "I won't have any more of this!"

For reply, Larry only gave another prolonged sneeze. Thoroughly enraged, Lomax sprang to the ground. Larry also emerged from his highly uncomfortable position; and the next instant the two faced each other.

"So it's you?" exclaimed the robber, starting back in astonishment.

"Yes, it is I," returned Larry boldly. "You didn't quite expect to see me, I take it."

"I must say I did not. What do you expect to gain by following me in this fashion, boy?"

"I am going to hand you over to justice," was the bold reply. "I set out to do it from the start, and I'm going to do it."

"You talk altogether too big for a boy!" growled Lomax, his face darkening. "Do you know that we are all alone here, and this is a mighty lonely spot?"

He said this with so much significance that a less brave boy than Larry would have shuddered. But the wanderer had faced too many perils to be thus easily daunted.

“What would you dare to do?” he questioned recklessly.

“Never mind, now. But I’ll tell you one thing. The best thing,—the very best,—for you to do is to get back to Carwell or Cleveland at once; give up every notion of capturing Boughton or me. The thing can’t be done, and you’ll only run a big risk in trying to do it.”

“You can’t scare me so easily, Lomax. You know, and so do I, that there is more behind this than the recovery of Mrs. Noxwell’s plate and her papers. You are trying to work another game, in which I somehow figure, and I’m going to make it my business to find out what that game is.”

At these words, the robber’s face grew darker than ever.

“Boy, you know too much!” he ejaculated, as he strode forward, and raised the whip he carried. “You are a fool to think that you—a mere stripling—can do anything against me, a man. You must have been reading half-dime novels.”

“No, I read something more exciting than half-dime novels; I read the daily newspapers,” was Larry’s reply, delivered in his old-time dry way. “Maybe I am nothing but a boy, but—here goes, Lomax!”

With the agility of a cat, he sprang upon the man, and tripped him up backward. The movement was so unexpected that Lomax had no time to defend himself,

or even resist, and in less time than it takes to tell it he found himself flat on his back. As he went down, Larry wrenched the whip from his grasp.

"Hold on!" yelled Lomax, and his cry was so loud that the horse took fright, and started forward on a run.

"See that, you've scared the horse," growled the robber. "I'll fix you for this! There he goes!"

"And I'll fix you if you attempt to move!" replied Larry with spirit. "Understand, Lomax, that I mean business this time. Stop where you are."

"What do you intend to do?"

"I'll hit you with the butt end of the whip if you attempt to rise," was Larry's determined reply, as he brandished the weapon in the air.

"You can't keep me here all day," grumbled Lomax, as he fell back in the dust once more, not relishing the idea of receiving such a blow as Larry seemed capable of administering.

"That's true, but I'll keep you here for a while—till help comes."

"It won't come. This road is almost deserted the year 'round."

"We'll wait and see."

Lomax was silent for a few minutes. Larry eyed him closely, ready to strike at the first sign of resistance.

"Come, come, boy, this is a farce," growled Lomax

at length. "Let me up, and I'll come down handsomely."

"You came down handsomely enough just a bit ago," grinned Larry. "That was enough for me, thank you."

"None of your chaff, boy."

"Then don't talk to me."

"I won't. How do you like that?"

Lomax doubled up quickly, and then shot out his two big feet at Larry, intending to catch the boy in the stomach. But Larry sprang back.

Lomax then attempted to rise, and received a cut over the shoulder with the whip. A fierce hand-to-hand struggle followed. Larry was hardly a match for the robber, but he held on bravely.

Then a man in a wagon appeared on the scene. The turnout was that belonging to Howard Bruin, and the man on the seat was the artist himself.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AN ASTONISHING STATEMENT

It was a most opportune arrival, for had Howard Bruin come a minute later, Pete Lomax might have been in a position to run for the woods to the north of the dusty road.

The artist lost no time in springing to the ground and in rushing forward to where the row was in progress.

"Hold him, Larry; don't let him get away!"

"I don't intend he shall get away," gasped the boy, who, if the truth must be told, was pretty well winded.

Lomax had heard Howard Bruin's voice, although he did not see the artist, and he redoubled his efforts to get away. He had almost succeeded when the other caught him by the arm and hurled him backward.

"Now, stand where you are, Lomax, or it will be the worse for you!" he commanded.

The robber thus confronted attempted to draw a pistol, but between them Larry and Howard Bruin quickly disarmed him.

"Now, Larry, bring the strap from the wagon, and we'll bind his hands."

"I won't submit!" roared Pete Lomax, but he quickly became quiet when Howard Bruin exhibited the pistol he had taken from the robber.

The strap was brought, and while the artist watched matters, Larry bound Lomax's hands behind him.

"Was he alone?" questioned the artist.

"Yes; I followed him all the way from Carwell."

"Where is Boughton and the bag?"

"That I don't know."

"It was lucky I came along the road when I did. We have recovered the horse and wagon and have one of the robbers."

"Robbers! What are you talking about?" blustered Lomax. "I am not a robber!"

"We'll let that matter rest until you are in the court room," replied the artist briefly. "Come, get into the wagon."

Lomax tried to raise all sorts of objections, but neither of his captors would listen.

"I can prove you are a robber," said Larry. "And the best you can do is to confess and give up the stolen stuff."

"I haven't anything to confess. I haven't any stuff."

This was all Lomax would say.

But on the return to Carwell he tried several times to escape. Each effort was unsuccessful, and Larry and the artist only watched him the closer.

At Carwell the two found the town still in such a state of excitement that they concluded it would be best to take Lomax directly to Cleveland.

"But if we do that, how about looking for Boughton and the bag?" asked Larry.

He did not mention Joshua Small.

"If you think you can get Lomax to Cleveland alone I will stay here and organize a search for Boughton and the bag," said the artist. "I have an idea where I can find him."

"Say," put in Lomax suddenly, "you'll never find them unless you're told."

"Do you think so?"

"I know it."

"Well?"

"You might be told for a consideration."

"I thought you said you knew nothing about this robbery, Lomax?"

"I said I wasn't a robber," returned the rascal evasively. "But I might be able to tell you where to look for the bag and Boughton if you would promise to let me go. It won't do either of you a bit of good to have me arrested."

"Then, you are willing to sell Boughton out?" asked Howard Bruin, with ill-concealed contempt for the man who had made the proposition.

"Yes, I am. He never treated me square from the start."

"And you won't tell us anything unless we promise to let you go."

"That's it."

"Then we will have to find out on our own hook," broke in Larry. "Don't you make any deal with the rascal, Mr. Bruin."

"I don't intend to," returned the artist decidedly. "I was only trying to pump him."

"Confound you both!" muttered Lomax. He was keenly disappointed at being unable to make his little plan work. "Well, do your worst. I defy you to prove that I am guilty. You are the guilty man; your handkerchief proved it, and this boy helped you."

"We'll see," said Howard Bruin quietly, but there was a peculiar gleam in his eyes, which did not escape Larry's notice.

Lomax, after this, pleaded again to be allowed to go, but neither Larry nor the artist would listen to him.

Ten minutes later, with Lomax bound securely, hands and feet, the boy started on the drive to the Cleveland jail.

"Won't they be surprised when I land the prisoner," thought Larry, and he waved his hand to Howard Bruin for the last time, as a bend in the road shut out Carwell from view.

For the first mile of the drive Lomax sat on a low box in the back of the wagon, without saying a word. Larry kept his eye on the man continually, resolved

that the robber should not be allowed a single opportunity to regain his liberty.

"See here, Larry, you're dead wrong in this affair," said Lomax at last, while they were on the loneliest bit of the road. "You are making the mistake of your life in having me arrested."

His tone was so earnest that the boy was astonished. What change had come over the robber to cause him to act in this manner?

"Making a mistake, eh?" he returned. "Well, I'll risk it, Lomax."

"But, my boy, you don't understand matters at all," insisted Lomax with still more earnestness. "It's all well enough for you to try to clear yourself of this crime, but when you try to fasten it on me, you put your feet into it deeper than ever."

"I don't see how."

"Well, you are, Larry. You don't know what an awful mistake you are making."

And Lomax shook his head earnestly.

"I wouldn't talk this way if I couldn't see what's ahead. I know more than you do of the future, because I know much of the past. See?"

Larry breathed hard. The last words of Lomax were something like a confession. He wondered what was coming next.

"Go on," he said huskily.

"It's my greatest desire to keep you from harm,

my boy, really it is," went on Lomax smoothly. "And when I see you running straight into it, I think it my duty to cry halt. It will harm you to have me locked up and sent to prison."

"I don't see how. Look here," went on Larry earnestly, "if you have anything to say about my past, speak up. I know you and Boughton and Joshua Small are plotting against me somehow, but what's in the wind is beyond me."

"I'm not plotting against you, Larry—never did, upon my honor. I've done wrong, but I never did that."

"Well, what do you know of the past? Do you know who my parents were?"

"Indeed, my boy, I do."

"Are they alive?"

Pete Lomax blinked his eyes and turned away his head. He appeared to be struggling with his emotions.

"Will you let me go if I tell you the truth, Larry?" he asked.

For a minute—aye, two minutes—a great struggle took place in Larry's breast. How he wished to know all this man might have to tell! But then he slowly shook his head.

"No, it wouldn't be right, and I can't do it," he said.

"You can't! Not even when the whole future hangs on it?"

"No! What's right is right, and that's all there is to it. If you won't tell what you know, perhaps I can force Luke Boughton or Joshua Small to speak."

"But, Larry, see here; you don't want to send your own father to prison, do you?" asked Lomax brokenly.

"My—own—father—to prison?" faltered the boy, turning deathly white all in an instant.

"That's what I said. Think of it—your own father in prison, and by your work."

"But—but I don't understand. Who is my father?"

Lomax bent forward.

"Look at me, Larry—*I am your father!*"

CHAPTER XXIX

LARRY SPEAKS HIS MIND

“You are my father?”

Larry uttered the words like one who has received a death sentence. That man his father—the man he was going to have locked up as a thief?

“Yes, my dear boy, I am your own father,” went on Lomax sadly. “I reckon the revelation don’t please you much.”

“I—I—why didn’t you tell me of this before?” faltered the boy, who for the time being was utterly bewildered. “Why didn’t you tell who you were when we first met?”

“I didn’t see as it would do any good. You were trying to lead a straightforward life, while I—well, I wasn’t doing just the right thing, and——”

“Indeed you were not doing the right thing!” burst out Larry. “You were doing the wrong thing entirely.”

“Don’t be too harsh on me, Larry. I was down on my luck, and Luke Boughton put me up to the job.”

For the moment Larry was silent, and his eyes fell. Lomax looked at him keenly, as if to see how far his words had impressed the boy.

"Don't drive so fast," went on the man presently.
"We don't want to strike Cleveland just yet."

Larry slowed up, but this remark put him upon a new train of thoughts. Try his best, he could not bring himself to believe that this coarse man, bound hands and feet behind him, was his father. No, no, such a thing could not be! Anything but that!

"You say Luke Boughton put you up to the job of robbing Mrs. Noxwell's house?"

"He did, Larry; I would never have gotten up such a scheme alone."

"You two did the job alone?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Never mind, I want to know."

"Yes, we did it alone."

"Then where does Joshua Small come in?"

For the moment Pete Lomax seemed disconcerted, and a frown wrinkled his repulsive face.

"That was another matter, Larry; he had nothing to do with the robbery. He and Boughton have a scheme on hand that I know nothing of."

"Well, what is this scheme on hand that you do know something of?" rejoined the boy quickly.

"There ain't none, Larry."

"Yes, there is."

The boy's reply was so short and sharp that Pete Lomax started. Evidently his declaration that he was

Larry's father had not produced the tremendous effect intended.

"'Pon my word, Larry, you are mistaken."

"No, I am not."

"Yes, you are, my son."

"Hold up, there!" cried Larry, turning and looking Lomax boldly in the face. "Don't you dare to call me your son, you contemptible scoundrel!"

Had a bomb exploded at Pete Lomax's feet he would not have been more thoroughly astonished. He started back, and his face turned a sickly green.

"What—wha——" he gasped.

"I say, don't you dare to call me your son!" repeated the boy hotly. "I don't believe I am your son, so there!"

"But you are, and I can prove it!" snapped Pete Lomax. "I can prove it, understand?"

"I don't believe it; but if I am your son, I won't own you for a father——"

"You'll have to."

"We'll see about that."

"I'll tell everybody."

Larry winced. He at once thought of kind Mrs. Kennington, and wondered what that lady would say to the news. It was a cruel prospect for the boy.

"I will tell everybody," repeated Pete Lomax. "They'll think you a fine one to bring your own father to jail."

Larry caught at the last words and he stopped the horse and swung around squarely.

"That is your little game, Pete Lomax, and you cannot make me believe different. You want to work on my feelings, so that I won't turn you over to the Cleveland authorities. That game won't work. You are going to jail just as fast as this horse can take you. Get up, there!"

Larry tapped the horse with the whip as he uttered the last words, and the animal bounded on as fast as ever. The boy was breathing hard, and his eyes flashed and blinked in a manner that showed that he was now aroused to the realization of the true state of affairs.

"Hold on!" yelled Pete Lomax, in alarm. "Hold on, just a minute!"

"Not a second," returned the boy. "Get down on your seat!"

"But I want to——"

"Shut up! I know what I am doing. We can talk in jail, if you want to talk so much."

Pete Lomax grated his teeth in rage, and uttered frightful things under his breath. His little plan for gaining freedom had failed utterly.

He glanced around to see where they were. The wagon was still traveling the country road, but the outskirts of Cleveland were not far off. In ten minutes more it would be too late to effect an escape.

He glanced at Larry. The boy was busy urging the

horse on. With rapid, but silent, movements, Lomax began to tug at the ropes which bound him.

Those around his wrists held, but at last, just as the first house in Cleveland appeared around a bend, he managed to kick off the ropes which held his legs.

Then rising to his feet, he made a flying leap from the rapidly moving wagon.

He landed on a soft patch of ground and managed, although not without considerable exertion, to keep his feet.

Then he started to run back, just as Larry made the discovery that his prisoner was endeavoring to escape.

"Hi! Stop!" cried the boy. "Whoa! whoa!"

He brought his horse to a standstill, and turned him about. Seeing that he would be pursued if he kept to the road, Pete Lomax made a dash for the open field on the right.

Larry at once sprang down and made after him.

"Stop! You cannot get away!" cried the boy. "Stop, I say!"

"Stop yourself!" howled Pete Lomax. "If you come any nearer I'll shoot you!"

"You can't fool me," returned Larry. "Stop, I say."

He kept on after the fugitive, and at the end of the field, which was several hundred feet from the road, he was close behind Lomax. Putting out his foot he tripped up the fellow.

“You—you——” panted the robber.

He got no further, for without taking the precaution to come down easily, Larry sat on the fellow’s chest with a suddenness which deprived Lomax of every particle of his wind.

Then he slid downward until he rested on the man’s lower limbs. This prevented Lomax from doing any kicking.

“Now you’ll understand that trying to escape is sheer foolishness,” said the boy coolly. “You are my prisoner, and you are going to the Cleveland jail.”

CHAPTER XXX

THE SEARCH FOR JOSHUA SMALL

WHILE Larry was deliberating as to what was best to do, he saw a man come from the near-by farm house and run toward him. The man carried a heavy club, and was evidently excited.

"What's the row here?" he yelled, as he came nearer.

"Come and help me tie this man up again," replied Larry. "He's just got away from me."

"Got away from you?"

"Yes."

"Who are you, and who is he?"

"Never mind about me. This man is a robber, and I am trying to get him to the Cleveland jail."

"Gee shoo! A robber, did you say?"

"He isn't telling the truth," put in Lomax. "He's a thief himself."

"Now you shut up!" cried Larry angrily. "If you say such a thing again I'll hit you, even when your hands are tied. I don't propose to stand your manners any longer."

"I see his arms are tied," said the farmer timidly

"Yes, and so were his legs. The rope is in my wagon out there. Will you please get it?"

The farmer hesitated a moment and then started off on a run. He soon returned with the rope.

"Who did he rob?" he asked.

"He is one of the men that robbed Mrs. Noxwell's house."

"Gee shoo! You don't say! Did you get the stuff back?"

"Not yet. The other man has that, and he has not yet been captured."

"And you ain't made no mistake about this chap?"

"Come along with me to Cleveland and see if I've made any mistake," returned Larry briefly.

To this the farmer at once consented. The two bound Pete Lomax tighter than he had been bound before, and the farmer sat guard over him in the back of the wagon, while Larry drove into the town and up to the jail.

A curious crowd at once collected, and they entirely filled Justice Raum's office when Pete Lomax was relieved from his bonds and marched inside.

"Who is this?" demanded the justice, as he gazed in astonishment at Larry.

"One of the robbers, your honor," returned the boy modestly, although for some reason he had never felt so happy as at this moment.

Justice Raum sprang to his feet.

"What?" he cried in amazement.

"One of the men who robbed Mrs. Noxwell's house, sir."

"You are sure?"

"Positive, sir."

"Well, well! I will hear your story. Silence in the court room."

The command was instantly obeyed, and one could have heard a pin drop as Larry related his somewhat long story to the police justice.

Pete Lomax interrupted him a great number of times, but all to no purpose. Larry's straightforward way had gained for him many friends, and although the justice did not consider it right that he should say so in public, he believed every word that the plucky boy uttered.

"And you say that Mr. Bruin is after his accomplice and the booty?" questioned Justice Raum, at length.

"Yes, your honor. I have every reason to believe that he will find his man before to-morrow, too."

"He will never find Boughton," broke in Pete Lomax, and then he stopped suddenly, in deep disgust.

"Why won't he find Boughton?" asked the justice quickly.

"I mean I don't believe he'll find any such man," stammered Lomax. "I—I don't know him at all."

"So it would seem," returned Justice Raum dryly.

"I say I don't! That boy's story is a tissue of falsehoods!" stormed Lomax, trying to appear dramatic. "He is a—a base fabricator. He stole that stuff—he and Howard Bruin, and——"

"You will have a regular hearing in the morning," broke in Justice Raum. "Officer, take him to jail."

"Going to lock me up?"

"Yes."

"But it's an outrage, sir, and I——"

"Silence! You will have a hearing in the morning, and that's enough."

Justice Raum would hear no more, and a second later Pete Lomax was marched to the corridor of the jail and then thrust into the very cell Larry had occupied!

In this manner had the wheel of fortune turned.

Strange to say, Pete Lomax had said nothing more about being Larry's father. Nevertheless the boy was worried over the matter, thinking that the rogue would reserve this bit of so-styled revelation until the morning.

"And when he is cornered, he may do his best to implicate me, anyway!" thought the boy bitterly. "He is a deep rascal, and a bad one."

As soon as the scene at the justice's office was over, Larry went to a nearby restaurant and got a lunch, and then secured some feed and water for his horse. A short while later he started on the return for Carwell,

resolved that no time should be lost in tracing the whereabouts of Luke Boughton and Joshua Small.

When Larry arrived at Carwell he looked in vain for Howard Bruin. Not a trace of the artist was to be found anywhere.

The excitement attending the strike had subsided for the day, and a few of the places of business were again open. Larry found a livery stable, and here put up the horse and wagon, to be called for later.

Once on the street again, the boy was undecided which way to turn next. His friend might be close at hand, or he might be miles away, and the same might be said of Luke Boughton and Joshua Small.

"I'll go on a quiet search through Carwell first," Larry thought. "I may come across some trace of one or the other of them."

He proceeded with great caution, for he did not wish to run afoul of any more of the car-shop strikers. He had had enough trouble with these people, and he wished to attend strictly to his own business.

Up one street and down another the boy went, peering into every alley and open doorway, and around the corners of houses and barns and hayricks. Once or twice he encountered rough-looking men, but got out of the way before they could accost him.

At length he found himself near the upper end of the village, where several roads led to the summer hotels up on the mountains back of Carwell.

Here he sat down on a large rock to think matters over, and ascertain, if possible, what would be the next move to make.

"It looks as if all hands had quitted Carwell," he said to himself. "Although they may be in one of the houses I just passed. My! how I wish I could get on the track of Joshua Small and run him down! I imagine an interview with him might reveal a good deal."

But Joshua Small had vanished like the rest, and it seemed of no avail to look for any of the missing parties.

After resting on the rock for a while, Larry determined to make his way to the nearest of the summer hotels, which he knew was scarcely half a mile away.

He covered the distance in a few minutes, and without any of the hesitation which would have been natural to a country boy, he boldly entered the open hallway and stepped up to the clerk's desk.

"May I look at your register, please?" he asked.

"Certainly. Here you are," and the clerk shoved the big book toward him.

Eagerly Larry looked over the list of arrivals for the past few days. The name of Joshua Small did not appear.

He was about to turn away, somewhat disappointed, when something peculiar about the signatures on the open page before him attracted his attention.

There was the name of Samuel Brown written in a hand that he thought he recognized. He scrutinized it still closer, and saw that the name Samuel was written over the letters "Jos."

"I've found him," thought Larry, much pleased over his discovery. "He was going to write Joshua Small in the register, and then changed his mind and used the name Samuel Brown. He evidently wants to keep his identity a secret. That alone looks bad for him."

"Can you find what you wish?" asked the clerk, who had been watching him.

"Yes, sir. Is Mr. Samuel Brown in?"

"Front!" called the clerk, and a colored bell-boy came up. "Go to No. 46 and see if Mr. Brown is in. What name?"

"Oh, never mind my name. I just want to know if he is in, that's all."

The clerk stared at Larry, but the boy's assurance made him imagine it was all right, and he nodded to the bell-boy, who at once disappeared up the broad and richly carpeted stairs.

The bell-boy was gone several minutes.

"Mr. Brown wishes you to send up your name," he said, upon his return.

"I will write him a note," said Larry. "Will you kindly allow me a bit of paper and an envelope?"

"See here, what kind of a game is this," demanded the clerk.

"It's a game to win," replied Larry, with a peculiar laugh. "Will you kindly supply me?"

"Certainly, but it's mighty mysterious. Isn't everything all right?"

"Hardly," and with this single word, Larry hastily scribbled the following note on the letter-head the clerk had given him:

"Mr. Small: Will you see me, or shall I send up a policeman? I mean business, and am not to be trifled with.

LARRY CURLY."

This note he placed in an envelope, which he sealed and addressed to Samuel Brown, and then gave it to the bell-boy to deliver.

As the boy passed up the stairs, Larry followed him. Fortunately the clerk behind the desk did not see him, being at that moment interested in a new lot of arrivals at the piazza steps.

Larry reached the head of the second flight of stairs just in time to see the bell-boy disappear into a nearby room. He waited for several minutes, and then approached the door of the room.

"Tell the boy that I—I will see him in about five minutes," he heard in the well-known voice of Joshua Small. "Tell him I will see him then, sure."

“ Yes, sah.”

The bell-boy opened the door and attempted to step out. As he did so, Larry peered into the room and saw Joshua Small reach for his hat and a bag, both of which rested on a nearby chair.

“ It’s all right,” said Larry, and pushing the bell-boy aside, he entered the room, and confronted his former employer.

“ Larry!” burst from Joshua Small’s lips.

“ Yes, Mr.—er—B—rown,” returned the boy coolly. “ You evidently didn’t expect to see me so soon. Supposing I——”

“ Hush!” whispered Joshua Small, a frightened look on his face. “ You can go; it’s—it’s all right,” he went on, to the bell-boy.

“ Yes, it’s all right,” put in Larry and he closed and locked the door and placed the key in his pocket. “ You didn’t expect to see me quite so soon, did you?”

“ What is this about a policeman?” almost chattered Joshua Small, for he was a thorough coward at heart.

“ You ought to know, Joshua Small. You know more about some things than I do, even though I just landed Pete Lomax in the Cleveland jail.”

“ Lomax in jail?”

“ Exactly; and your other friend, Luke Boughton, will be there before long, too.”

“ He is not my friend. I have nothing to do with him or with this Lomax,” whined the rich farmer.

"I—I—it is all a mistake, Larry, all a mistake, my dear boy."

"That's just what Lomax said, but he'll go to prison, nevertheless," responded Larry coldly.

His object was to frighten the craven heart before him as much as possible.

"You don't mean to say you will—will try to send me to prison?" and Joshua Small's face grew as white as the wall, while he trembled in every limb.

"Well, that depends. Did you have anything to do with the Noxwell robbery?"

"No!" fairly shouted the old farmer. "Never!"

"Then, if you are willing to tell me all about this secret of my past life, I may give you a chance to go clear. If not, you'll take your chances with the others in the Cleveland jail."

These direct words caused Joshua Small to tremble once more from head to foot. A cold sweat sprang out on his forehead, which he wiped away with his red bandanna, and then he sank on a chair.

"How do you know I know anything of your past?" he faltered.

"I overheard enough of your talk and the talk of Lomax and Boughton to assure me of that. I want to know where all this money comes in, and who and what I am."

"I don't know all, but I know something," returned Joshua Small slowly. "If I make a clean breast of

it, will you see to it that I am not prosecuted by—by—any one?”

“That will depend on how you act. For the sake of Mrs. Small, who was at times quite kind to me when I worked on the farm, I am willing to be easy on you, if you show a disposition to square matters and turn over a new leaf.”

“I wasn’t to blame,” whined Joshua Small, rubbing his bony hands together nervously. “Boughton came to me and offered me so much money it turned my head. He said you wasn’t no common stock, and that there was big wealth coming to you—land and stock and so—and so—he and that Lomax turned my head. I would never have followed you up otherwise.”

“And you will tell me all you know now?” asked Larry impatiently.

“Yes, I will; I’ll tell you the whole story from beginning to end,” replied Joshua Small.

CHAPTER XXXI

A PLEASING REVELATION

LARRY was in a fever of excitement over what his former employer might have to say. He fully understood that the assertion that there was money coming to him was true. Had it not been so, Lomax and Boughton would never have gone to the trouble of sending for Joshua Small to come and help them work up their plot to rob the boy of his inheritance.

"It's rather a long story, and I don't know if I can tell you it straight, but I'll try," said Joshua Small, after breathing hard for a moment. "You know how them hospital folks and some charity institution commissioners turned you over to me to work on the farm?"

"Yes."

"Well, shortly after that this man Lomax turned up, and he came to me half a dozen times, but not until the very last did he tell me anything of the real object of his visit, which was to prove if you was the boy from the hospital and to find out all the hospital folks had had to say about you."

"You told him what you knew?"

"I told him some. You see, I—I—well, you was a good hand, and I didn't want to lose you," faltered Joshua Small. "Besides, I didn't like the looks of the man."

"But you lost me, anyway," put in Larry, with something of the old dry laugh in his tones.

"Yes, that's so," resumed Joshua Small. "I did, Larry, and I was mighty sorry. But we'll let that pass."

"Yes, let that pass, and tell me what you know," added the boy quickly.

"Well, Lomax was tearing mad when he found that you had run away. He accused me first of sending you off and trying to make some money on my own account. That was the first I knew that there was money in the affair."

"And who did he claim I was?"

"He wouldn't say that, but he wanted me to stand by and prove that you were the boy found in the basement of that house on Cherry Street, in New York. Well, after awhile he left, and I didn't hear any more of him until a few days ago. Then he wanted me to come out here and identify you if I could. You see, he was afraid he might be making some mistake, not knowing you as well as I did."

"And you identified me, of course?"

"Yes. Then Lomax introduced Boughton to me, and Boughton did a lot of talking, and finally offered

me a lot of money if I would go with them. They said you belonged to a rich family and had been stolen away during your childhood, and that by restoring you to your folks we could make ourselves rich. But it was to take cash to do the work, and I must advance some, for which they would give as security a lot of silver plate which had belonged to Lomax's grandfather——"

"The plate that was stolen from Mrs. Noxwell?" burst in Larry.

"More than likely, Larry. I was a fool to listen to 'em, I know I was. Well, Boughton and Lomax acted so strange, and when you come on the scene I was all mixed up. I kinder thought the whole thing was a fizzle and that they would get my money and run away, but I've got it here yet, although Boughton is coming to see me to-day."

"To-day?"

"Yes; but I reckon I won't make the deal now," and Joshua Small pursed up his thin lips.

"Look here!" cried the boy. "If you will help me to capture Luke Boughton and obtain from him a full confession, I will do all I can to clear you of this miserable business."

"Will you?"

"I will."

"Then it's a whack, Larry, and I'll make him speak up or choke the words out of him."

At that moment a bell-boy came to the door of the room.

"A gentleman below wishes Mr. Brown to come down. Gentleman by the name of Bell."

"That's him," said Joshua Small to Larry. "He told me he wouldn't come up, but would take me to where he had the plate and his papers."

"Then go with him, and I will follow," returned Larry. "Pretend to come to terms with him so that he shows his hand, as the saying is."

"All right, Larry, if you say so."

Joshua Small followed the bell-boy down, and a second later Larry left the room also.

Looking down the opening of the circular staircase, the boy saw the old farmer shake hands with Luke Boughton, and then the two passed out of the hotel.

Larry was not far behind, and keeping out of sight behind some shrubbery, he saw the pair make their way rapidly toward the rocky district leading to the river.

Larry prepared to follow, when suddenly a hand was placed on his shoulder and he found himself confronted by Howard Bruin and Officer Angus.

"Larry, what brought you here?" cried the artist. "Where is Pete Lomax?"

"In the Cleveland jail," answered the boy. "I am following Luke Boughton and Joshua Small."

"They are here, then, eh?" put in Officer Angus.

"We thought we traced that Boughton to the vicinity."

"Come with me," said Larry. "I will tell you what is up."

And as the three proceeded along the rocks he told his story to his friend and the officer, who had joined Howard Bruin in the search but a short hour before.

"Well, Larry, this mystery concerning your identity must be cleared up, that's certain," said the artist. "If these men hold it they must be forced to tell what they know."

A few minutes later they saw Luke Boughton lead Joshua Small into a secluded spot under a series of overhanging rocks.

They came close to the place, and by listening attentively overheard every word that was being spoken.

"I need a thousand dollars," Boughton was saying, "and I've got the plate here in a bag to give you as security for the money."

"But what's this secret about the boy?" questioned Joshua Small.

"That has nothing to do with this matter. I am speaking about the silver plate. Isn't that security enough?"

"I ain't making any deal until I know the whole truth about that boy," returned the old farmer bluntly, and it was evident that the matter had been talked over on the way to the place.

"It won't do you any good," insisted Boughton.

"Maybe not; but can't you trust me if I'm to trust you?"

"Well, it's just here, but you mustn't breathe it to a soul. That boy's mother is living and rich. She thinks he is dead—that he died when he was a youngster. Now, I want to restore her son to her and make some money out of it. But to work the deal will take money, because I've got to work slowly, and maybe I'll have to shift around a good bit, so as to avoid getting into trouble, see?"

"You are going to make her pay before you restore her son, eh?"

"That's it, Mr. Small. Great scheme, eh?"

"Yes. Who is the lady?"

"Oh, that's the secret."

"And Larry Curly don't suspect anything?"

"No; why should he? But it will be a great thing for him in the end, so he needn't kick, and if I——"

Luke Boughton did not finish. In trying to shift his position Officer Angus had stepped upon a loose stone and fell headlong in plain sight of the robber.

"Hi! what's this?" cried Boughton, starting back in alarm.

"It means that your game is up," called out Howard Bruin, as he stepped into view, followed by Larry.

"We have tracked you down at last, Boughton."

"Yes," put in Angus, scrambling to his feet and

drawing his pistol. "Surrender, you villain, in the name of the law of this State and township of Cleveland!"

And the district officer looked as fierce as possible.

Luke Boughton attempted to retreat, but before he had taken two steps Larry was upon him and had him fast.

"You shall not escape!" cried the boy. "The other man is all right. Watch this one."

"What—what——" began Boughton. Then he looked at Joshua Small, and his face grew dark. "Did you lead me into this trap?"

"I reckon I did," returned the old farmer. "I ain't for going into any dishonest game with you. Hear that, officer?" he added to Angus.

"Yes, sir."

Officer Angus quickly produced a pair of handcuffs and placed them upon Luke Boughton's wrists.

A search for the stolen goods was made, and they were found in the original bag, hidden in a nearby nook.

The bag was opened, and among the plate and other stuff taken Officer Angus brought to light the legal papers Mrs. Noxwell had insisted that Howard Bruin had taken.

"There, that clears me," muttered the artist. "Now, I will take double pleasure in defeating her in the lawsuit."

In the meantime Larry had turned to Luke Boughton.

"Boughton, will you clear up this mystery for me concerning myself?" he asked anxiously.

"No, I won't," snapped the robber. "You are the one who had me arrested, and now you can go on and be a nobody for the rest of your life."

CHAPTER XXXII

NO LONGER A NOBODY—CONCLUSION

“You will not say a word?” gasped the boy.

“No, I won’t. You are fixed now to be nothing but a tramp all the rest of your life.”

“I won’t be a tramp, but—but——”

“This is a shame!” burst out Howard Bruin. “If you have one spark of manhood in your veins, speak up and tell the boy who he is.”

Luke Boughton shrugged his shoulders.

“I will, on one condition.”

“What is that?”

“Give me my liberty.”

“Oh, we can’t do that!” put in Officer Angus hastily. “Against the law—quite against the law—and a criminal offense.”

“Then I haven’t a word to say.”

“Why don’t you search him?” suggested Joshua Small rather timidly. “He allers carried around a lot of papers——”

“Shut up!” fairly shrieked Luke Boughton. “Haven’t you caused me trouble enough already? I haven’t anything of value.”

"That's enough!" broke in Howard Bruin. "Stand still till I see what your pockets contain."

"I won't! Let me go—do you hear?—let me go!"

Luke Boughton struggled to break away, but while Officer Angus and Larry held him, the artist went through first one pocket and then another.

Several papers and opened letters were brought to light. Then came a new-looking envelope, which was sealed.

The artist looked at the address on the envelope and gave a violent start.

"Impossible!" he muttered, and then he looked at Larry strangely. "It can't be so!"

"What is it?" questioned the boy eagerly.

"I—I—wait a minute, Larry—I don't want to disappoint you, but—I—I——"

Howard Bruin broke off to glance at several of the papers and then shoved everything that had been taken from Luke Boughton into his pocket. "Come with me, my boy."

"Come with you?"

"Yes, at once."

"But where are you going?"

"Never mind, come on. Oh, I hope it is true!"

"See here!" burst in Officer Angus. "Going to leave me alone with this man?"

"Small can help you watch him, and we'll send down

help from the hotel. Larry and I must go. Come, Larry."

Impelled by the artist's earnestness, the boy followed his friend back to the hotel, where they left word concerning the capture of the second robber. Then a wagon was procured to take Howard Bruin and Larry to Carwell.

At the latter place they procured the artist's turnout, and then started on the road to Cleveland.

Howard Bruin would answer no questions.

"Prepare yourself for a great surprise, Larry," was all he said. "It must be true. Your features prove it."

"Prove what?"

"Wait and see."

To Larry's surprise, when the turnout reached the Kennington mansion, Howard Bruin drove the horse through the open gate and up to the front piazza.

"We will get out and call on Mrs. Kennington for a moment," he said. "I must ask her some questions."

In a moment more the two stood in the kind lady's presence. The artist seemed strangely agitated, and Larry's heart was fairly jumping with excitement. What had this good lady to do with his future?

"Mrs. Kennington," began Howard Bruin, "we have caught the two robbers who stole Mrs. Noxwell's silver plate and papers, and the booty has been recovered."

"I am very glad to hear it," replied the lady with a bright smile. "That clears you and our young friend here."

And she placed an affectionate hand upon Larry's shoulder.

"It does, and I can assure you that I am greatly relieved."

"And so am I," put in Larry. "And I shall never forget your kindness in going my bail."

"One of the robbers was a man named Luke Boughton," went on the artist. "He had on his person a number of papers, some of which may interest you."

"Me?" cried Mrs. Kennington, and Larry's heart seemed fairly to stand still.

"Yes. By one of the papers I see that he was married to a woman by the name of Matilda Rinsel——"

"My former nurse!"

"I thought it might be. In these papers mention is made of the children which were lost."

"Children?"

"Yes."

"But only one child was lost—Gregory. The others died, poor dears!" and Mrs. Kennington wiped a tear from her cheek at the sad memory.

"He speaks of two children, and tells of how they became separated and how the Italians in Brooklyn got possession of the older of the two."

“And what became of the other?” cried the lady eagerly. “Tell me, quick! Matilda said it died and was buried in a pauper’s grave on account of the disease—and we could not recover the body!”

“The paper does not state what became of the younger boy. Did you ever suspect that Matilda Rinsel was married?”

“No; she was not a woman to be trusted, and it was only by the Captain’s kindness that we gave her the place as a nurse. He had known her father at the port of Bremen, in Germany.”

“She was evidently in some scheme against you when death cut that scheme short. But this is not all. Here is a letter addressed to you, found in Luke Boughton’s pocket.”

And he handed the letter over.

Mrs. Kennington tore open the epistle and perused it carefully.

“He says my boy is alive and not far off!” cried the woman. “He says that for ten thousand dollars he will restore my lost son to me!”

Howard Bruin looked at the woman and then looked at Larry. How very much the two resembled each other!

“You will not have to pay him any money, Mrs. Kennington, for, unless I am very much mistaken, Larry here is that missing son.”

“Larry?”

"Me?" almost shouted the boy. "Me Mrs. Kennington's son?"

"Yes, Larry. Don't you see it all, how Luke Boughton wished to get Joshua Small to identify you as the boy from the hospital—the one found in the basement in Cherry Street, New York? Well, another paper states that the two children were left in Cherry Street with an old woman called Mother Welsh, and it was from this place that Gregory was stolen by the Italians. You were left behind——"

"Yes! yes! it must be!" cried Mrs. Kennington. "He must be my son! I feel it in my heart! That is what drew me to him from the start! Oh, Larry, my boy, my boy!"

She rushed over and caught him to her breast, and from that instant the boy felt that the secret of his life was revealed.

But he could not realize it in full at first. All the papers and letters taken from Luke Boughton had to be gone over carefully, and while this was being done Gregory came in and had to be told the wonderful news. He wrung Larry's hand as it had never been wrung before, and the two became then and there the closest of brothers.

"It is all true," said Mrs. Kennington at last. "Larry, are you not glad?"

"Glad?" repeated the boy, with just a touch of his old-time dryness—Mrs. Kennington said afterward that

he took this from his father. "Well, I don't know. If I'm glad, why in creation do I feel so much like crying?"

And he suddenly burst into tears, the first he ever remembered shedding. They were tears of joy, that came from the very bottom of his stout young heart.

A couple of hours later all left the mansion and drove to Cleveland. They went straight to the jail and held long interviews with Lomax and Boughton.

Lomax was at first very sullen, and when Gregory Kennington went to him he threatened that young man with exposure.

"If I am to go to prison, I'll expose you," he said. "You know I have the whip hand over you."

"That is true, Lomax, but exposing me will do you no good."

"Never mind, I'll expose you. The world shall know that you are a forger."

"What's this?" cried Howard Bruin. "Gregory a forger?" He had entered just in time to hear the latter words.

Gregory hung his head.

"I suppose they would call me such," faltered the young man, "but——"

At this juncture Justice Raum appeared.

"We have just made an important discovery," he said. "This man Lomax is a clever forger from Philadelphia, known as Penman Pete. He pretends to be

unable to write even fairly well, but he is a skillful penman and works his schemes everywhere."

"What schemes?" cried Gregory eagerly.

"He drugs men, and when they recover tries to make them believe that they have committed forgeries, which in reality he has committed. It is an old game, but wonderfully effective."

"He drugged me!" fairly shouted Gregory. "You rascal! I will make you confess, or I will——"

He sprang at Lomax and bore him backward. The robber grew greatly scared and cried for help.

"Will you confess?"

"Yes! yes! I might as well. They have found me out. Let up on me."

The others now sprang forward, and the two were separated. But Pete Lomax was now thoroughly broken down, and later on he confessed everything. He had made Gregory think himself the forger of a check for one hundred dollars, the money being drawn from Mrs. Kennington's account.

In the meanwhile Mrs. Kennington and Larry were talking to Luke Boughton. This man was completely astonished when he learned that they had discovered his secret. He was forced to confess that Larry was Mrs. Kennington's son, but would not go into the details of his marriage with Matilda Rinsel, or of the plot they laid to steal the two children.

A few days later Lomax and Boughton were tried

and sentenced to several years in the State prison. Joshua Small was not prosecuted, and he returned to his farm a sadder, but wiser man.

Several months after this the great lawsuit between Mrs. Noxwell and Howard Bruin was tried. The verdict was in favor of the artist, and the arrogant and proud woman was compelled to pay over a sum that made a most alarming hole in her wealth. She was so dismayed over her defeat that shortly after this she sold out and left the vicinity of Eagle Lake, and that was the last our friends saw of her or her daughter.

But now we must bring our narrative to a close. Several years have flitted by. Larry is now at college and expects some day to become a lawyer. Gregory has turned over a new leaf and taken up the profession of a doctor. Howard Bruin still works with pen and pencil, and is fast becoming famous. He is a constant visitor at the Kennington mansion, where the lady of the house is ever ready to give him a warm welcome.

Mrs. Kennington is very happy; happy to think that Gregory is doing so well, and doubly happy to think that Heaven has given her such a bright and manly son as the boy who was once known as "Larry the Wanderer."

THE END

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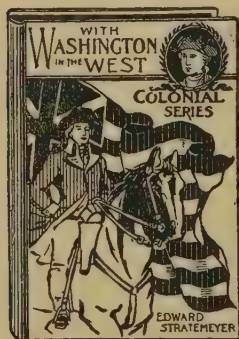
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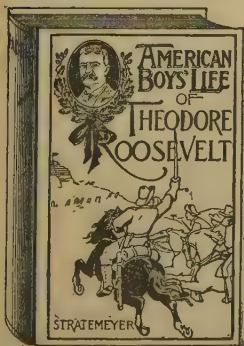
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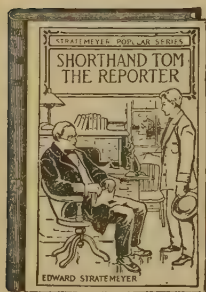
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